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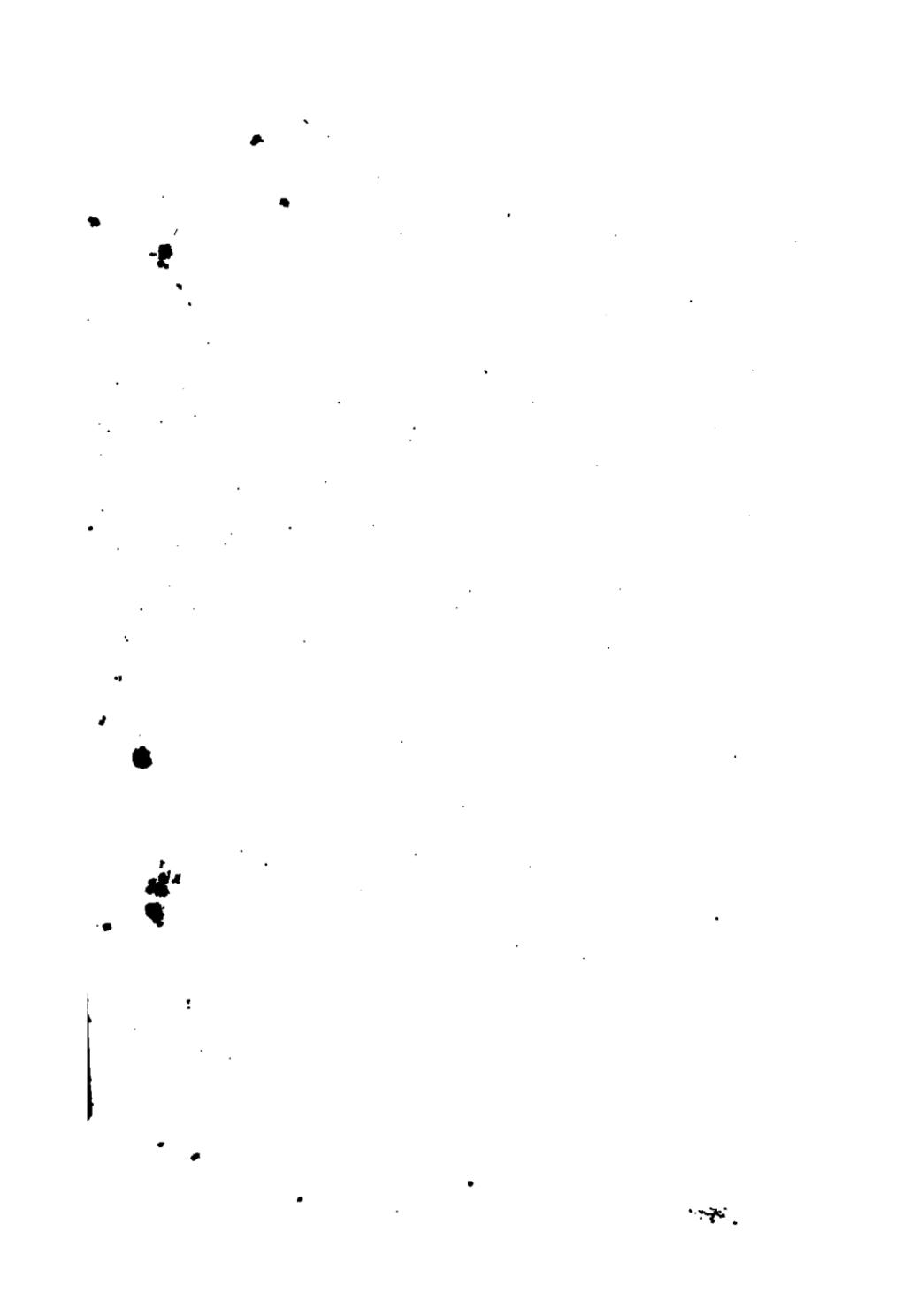
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A DRAMATIC POEM

BY

AUBREY DE VERE

AUTHOR OF 'ALEXANDER THE GREAT'



HENRY S. KING & CO., LONDON

1876

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P R E F A C E.

MR. FREEMAN, in his remarkable essay ‘St. Thomas of Canterbury and his Biographers,’ observes:—‘If we wish fairly to judge of the right and the wrong between Henry and Thomas, we must first of all shut our eyes to all modern controversies whatever. We must not carry into that region any modern theories about Church and State, about Catholicism and Protestantism.’ The remark applies no less to a drama on the subject of Becket, since it should neither be written nor read in a polemical spirit. What we are concerned with is the character of the man and the aims of his life. To understand either, we must bear in mind the principles and the main tendencies of the age in which he lived. If in recent times our best writers have maintained a more

impartial estimate of that great man than had for some time been common, the change is due, not to any theological bias in his favour, but to a more accurate acquaintance with the facts and the philosophy of history. I shall endeavour to illustrate, rather in their language than my own, a few of the chief characteristics of Becket's time that throw a light upon the memorable career which I have ventured to dramatise.

The age of Becket, like the preceding age, was one of innovations ; and those innovations had tended to the establishment of a rule more despotic than the Saxon. The Conqueror had combined arbitrary sway with much of justice and wisdom in detail. In the days of Rufus the despotic instinct showed itself in a series of ruthless enterprises, both against civil rights and the property as well as freedom of the Church. Henry Beauclerk had waged against the Church a war of policy ; but he had met an opponent, his equal both in wisdom and perseverance ; and in his chief designs he was worsted. His grandson revered his memory, and renewed a battle which had in a large measure fallen into abeyance during the troubled reign of

Stephen. The despotic power which he had inherited he endeavoured to consolidate through the sanctions of law—law enacted practically by the will of the sovereign, and the execution of which remained chiefly in his hands. All that his predecessors had done he regarded as but the foundation on which he was to raise a complete edifice of social order, but also of imperial rule.

The Conquest eventually bequeathed to England many blessings; but it began by reducing the mass of her native race to a condition almost of slavery. The liberties of the native Church shared in the general depression, and that Church was drawn all the closer to the affections of the people by the common wrong. It was impossible for the Saxon serf to remember the old Saxon laws, still recognised in theory, without feeling that, so far as they survived in power, they were to him represented by that English Church which in his fallen fortunes had never forsaken him. At its utmost need the rights of that Church had found their bravest assertor in one of those foreign prelates set over it by a king of the conquering race; and the reviving pulses of a people, destined

to be free, had beaten in sympathy with him. It is thus that an eminent writer illustrates that momentous period, in a history which is especially a History of the English People:—

‘The Conquest, as we have seen, had robbed the Church of all moral power as the representative of the higher national interests against a brutal despotism, by placing it in a position of mere dependence on the Crown ; and yet, though the struggle between William [Rufus] and the Archbishop turned for the most part on points which have no direct bearing on our history, the boldness of Anselm’s attitude not only broke the tradition of ecclesiastical servitude, but infused through the nation at large a new spirit of independence.’¹ Again he remarks, passing on to the next reign:—‘The moral revolution, which events like this indicate, was backed by a religious revival, which forms a marked feature in the reign of Henry I. Pious, learned, and energetic as the bishops of William’s [the Conqueror’s] appointment had been, they were not Englishmen. Till Becket’s time no Englishman occupied the throne of Canterbury.’ . . . ‘Lanfranc

¹ ‘Short History of the English People,’ by J. R. Green, p. 86.

indeed exercised a great personal influence over William ; but Anselm stood alone against Rufus ; and no voice of ecclesiastical freedom broke the simoniac silence of the reign of Henry I.' He proceeds to show the degree in which England owed the progress of her Constitution to the great prelates who vindicated the freedom of her Church :—

' . . . We see the strength of the new movement in the new class of ecclesiastics that it forces on the stage ; men like Anselm or John of Salisbury, or the two great prelates who followed one another after Henry's death in the see of Canterbury, Theobald and Thomas, derived whatever might they possessed from sheer holiness of life and unselfishness of aim. The revival left its stamp on the fabric of the Constitution itself ; the paralysis of the Church ceased as the new impulse bound the prelacy and people together ; and its action, when at the end of Henry's reign it started into a power strong enough to save England from anarchy, has been felt in our history ever since.'¹

Yet it was against these men that the Norman sovereigns had warred, and their aggression against

¹ 'Short History of the English People,' by J. R. Green, p. 92.

the religious liberties of England was consummated by the far more advanced and systematic scheme of kingly power devised by Henry Plantagenet. He worked largely through Councils which he overawed; but his aims were far from being merely selfish. Of all the Plantagenet kings he was the greatest except Edward I. He was a man of wide knowledge and boundless energy; less vindictive than fierce in anger; frugal, and yet often generous. He was fond of raising up new men, and in a large degree he governed through them; yet, while he looked with jealousy on the great nobles, he knew how to attach them. In countless matters of detail he was a true reformer: he desired to substitute for social confusion a reign of law, on condition only that that law should be made practically by himself, and never stand in the way of royal power; and, like his grandfather, he pursued the policy of abolishing distinctions between the Norman conquerors and the native English. But he had also grievous defects. His religion was scant, and rather superstitious than practical. He was immoral; he was insincere; and though his courage and wonderful swiftness of action gave him

the promise of magnificent successes, his extreme caution, as well as the distractions occasioned first by religious and next by domestic feuds, left his enterprises incomplete. Henry II. had a consistent ideal of policy which, to him, approved itself as one fit to advance the greatness of his empire as well as of its ruler ; but to suppose that he had taken his stand on the ancient ways, and found himself assailed by novel ecclesiastical pretensions, is a reverse reading of historic facts. As well might we imagine that his aspiration was to transfer to the people the powers which he desired to take from the clergy and the Baronage. Let us listen to Mr. Green again :—

‘Henry II. had even less reverence for the feudal past than the men of his day ; he was indeed utterly without the imagination and reverence which enable men to sympathise with any past at all. He had a practical man’s impatience of the obstacles thrown in the way of his reforms by the older constitution of his realm, nor could he understand other men’s reluctance to purchase undoubted improvements by the sacrifice of customs and traditions of bygone days. Without any theore-

tical hostility to the co-ordinate powers of the State, it seemed to him a perfectly reasonable and natural course to trample either Baronage or Church under foot to gain his end of good government. He saw clearly that the remedy for such anarchy as England had endured under Stephen lay in the establishment of a kingly government unembarrassed by any privileges of order or class, administered by royal servants, and in whose public administration the nobles acted simply as delegates of the sovereign. His work was to lie in the organisation of judicial and administrative forms which realised the idea ; but of the great currents of thought and feeling which were tending in the same direction he knew nothing. What he did for the great moral and social revolution of his time was simply to let it alone. Religion grew more and more identified with patriotism under the eyes of a king who whispered, and scribbled, and looked at picture-books during mass, who never confessed, and cursed God in wild frenzies of blasphemy. . . .¹ Henry's 'reign of law' was, and could but be, the old imperial dream ; and, as Mr. Green remarks,

¹ 'Short History &c.,' p. 101.

'Great peoples formed themselves on both sides of the sea round a sovereign who bent the whole force of his mind to hold together an empire which the growth of nationality must inevitably destroy. There is throughout a tragic grandeur in the irony of Henry's position ; that of a Sforza of the fifteenth century set in the midst of the twelfth, building up by patience, and policy, and craft a composite dominion, alien to the deepest sympathies of his age, and swept away in the end by popular forces to whose existence his very cleverness and activity blinded him.'¹ Such a policy might heal some old wounds in England ; but it must inflict new and deeper. To meet the trials thus engendered there rose up a Becket. It is thus that a high historical authority speaks :—'With the accession of the Angevin dynasty the purely Norman period comes to an end. Norman and Englishman alike have to struggle for their own against the perpetual intrusion of fresh shoals of foreigners, a process almost equivalent to a second conquest. The natural effect of this struggle was that Norman and Englishman forgot their differences, and united in resistance to the common enemy. Under the

¹ 'Short History &c.,' p. 102.

great Henry, the ruler and lawgiver of this second conquest, the struggle is for a while delayed, *or veils itself under an ecclesiastical form.* A prelate of English birth, but of the purest Norman descent, wins the love of the English people in a struggle in which nothing but an unerring instinct could have shown them that their interest was in any way involved.'¹

But this struggle was neither exclusively ecclesiastic nor begun by Becket. It was forced upon him. It was the instinct of 'Cæsarism' which drove Henry upon his design to suppress the liberties of the Church in the several states that composed his empire. 'A despotism both of law and of the sword could alone thoroughly unite them. Probably he intended that it should be a just despotism ; but the just despot is followed by the unjust one.'²

¹ 'History of the Norman Conquest of England,' by E. A. Freeman, introduction, p. 5.

² Henry's imperial dream necessarily required the reduction of the Baronage as well as of the freedom of the Church—the two powers which, balancing that of the Crown, produced, in the form of equipoise, such an approach to freedom as was in those ages possible, the popular elements of power as yet not existing, save in their rudiments. Henry's proceedings against the Barons are thus referred to by Mr. Green :—'The close of the great struggle [that with Becket] left Henry free to complete his great work of legal

That the cause of true civilisation was sustained, not impeded, by Becket and the other great prelates so often represented as forgers of chains, has been shown by those writers who differed from them fundamentally in their theological belief, such as Guizot and Lord Macaulay ; the latter well observes :—

‘ It is remarkable that the two greatest and most salutary social revolutions which have taken place in England, that revolution which in the thirteenth century put an end to the tyranny of nation over nation, and that revolution which, a few generations later, put an end to the property

reform. He had already availed himself of the expedition against Toulouse to deliver a crushing blow at the Baronage by the commutation of their personal services in the field for a money payment, a “scutage,” or “shield-money,” for each fief. The king thus became master of resources which enabled him to dispense with the military support of his tenants, and to maintain a force of mercenary soldiers in their place. The diminution of the military power of the nobles had been accompanied by measures which robbed them of their legal jurisdiction. The circuits of the judges were restored, and instructions were given them to enter the manors of the Barons, and make enquiry into their privileges ; while the office of sheriff was withdrawn from the great nobles of the shire, and entrusted to the lawyers and courtiers who already furnished the staff of justices. The resentment of the Barons found an opportunity of displaying itself when the king’s eldest son, whose coronation had played so great a part in the history of Archbishop Thomas, suddenly took refuge with the King of France, and demanded to be put into possession of his English realm’ (p. 105).

of man in man, were silently and imperceptibly effected. . . . It would be unjust not to acknowledge that the chief agent in the two great deliverances was religion ; and it may perhaps be doubted whether a purer religion might not have been found a less efficient agent. . . . The first protector whom the English found among the dominant class was Archbishop Anselm. . . . It was a national as well as a religious feeling that drew great multitudes to the shrine of Becket, the first Englishman who, since the Conquest, had been terrible to the foreign tyrants. A successor of Becket was foremost among those who obtained that charter which secured at once the privileges of the Norman barons and of the Saxon yeomanry. How great a part the Roman Catholic ecclesiastics subsequently had in the abolition of villenage we learn from the unexceptionable testimony of Sir Thomas Smith, one of the ablest Protestant counsellors of Elizabeth. When the dying slaveholder asked for the last sacraments, his spiritual attendants regularly adjured him, as he loved his soul, to emancipate his brethren for whom Christ had died.'¹

¹ Macaulay's 'History of England,' chap. i.

It was not unnatural then that the people should have regarded the ‘Liberties of the Church’ with pride and with love, or that kings who had inherited arbitrary rule should desire to undermine them. Henry’s war against them began with the assertion, in a new and more stringent form, of those ‘Royal Customs’ which, to the modern imagination, have often presented the image of something venerable, while they were but new Customs opposed to ancient laws. Some were wholly novel, while others were those innovations by which the Conqueror and his two sons had partially set aside
✓ both the laws of England and also her authentic and immemorial customs. King Henry’s Royal Customs were embodied in the ‘Constitutions of Clarendon.’ Of them Mr. Green remarks:—
• ‘Many of its clauses were simply a re-enactment of the system established by the Conqueror.’ After specifying five belonging to this category, he proceeds:—‘*But the legislation respecting ecclesiastical jurisdiction was wholly new.*’¹

Professor Stubbs, who is not in sympathy with Becket, makes the same admission:—‘While some of

¹ Green’s ‘Short History of the English People,’ p. 103.

the “Constitutions” only state in legal form the customs which had been adopted by the Conqueror and his sons, others of them seem to be developments or expansions of such customs, in forms and with applications that belong to a much more advanced state of the law.¹ The best of those ‘Constitutions’ were then innovations made by three despotic kings ; for Professor Stubbs describes the Norman monarchy as practically a despotism which had ‘discarded the limitations’ both of the French and the English sovereignty ; and he tells us that the councils of the Norman kings were assemblies so servile that they ‘may seem scarcely entitled to the name of a national council.’² The remaining ‘Constitutions’ Becket could only have regarded as ‘developments’ of customs evil and new. At the Council of Westminster a far more moderate demand had been made ; but on it Professor Stubbs remarks :—‘The Archbishop saw that to concede this unreservedly would be to place the whole of the clergy at the king’s mercy.’³ Surely then, whatever view may be taken of the ‘Constit-

¹ ‘Constitutional History,’ vol. i. p. 465.

² *Ibid.* p. 358.

³ *Ibid.* p. 464.

tutions, there can be little doubt as to the motives and aims of Becket.

As to the character of the ‘Royal Customs,’ in their new form, we have an unexceptionable witness, the Empress Matilda. It is thus that Nicolas of Rouen writes :—‘John of Oxford, who, on his way from England to the Court [*i.e.* Rome], and on his return, paid a visit to the Empress, endeavoured to exasperate her against you by every malicious insinuation possible. . . . The day following she excluded everyone from her presence, and ordered us to read to her in Latin [the ‘Constitutions’ embodying the ‘Royal Customs’] and make our comments in French. The woman is from a stock of tyrants, and approved some of them, particularly that which forbids the excommunication of the king’s servants without his permission. . . . With far the greater number she found fault ; and what offended her, above all, was their being reduced to writing, as well as the attempt to exact from the bishops a promise of their observance; “for this,” she said, “was without precedent.”’¹

¹ Hurrell Froude’s ‘History of the Struggle,’ &c. p. 134.

We must bear in mind, while forming our judgment on Becket's conduct, that Matilda's estimate of the so-called Royal Customs was his in a yet stronger sense. In a letter to his suffragan bishops he describes them as 'not those Customs, but rather those corruptions, by which at the present time the Church of England is disturbed, and put to confusion.' Apart from the authority of the ancient Saxon laws,¹ 'they were, many of them, contrary to the known charters of the land given by Norman kings to the Church, and contrary to the received maxims of the general canons.' Dr. Lingard, in his analysis of the 'Constitutions of Clarendon,' points out that the first of them 'could not claim higher antiquity than William Rufus,' and that it had been, 'renounced after his death by all his successors, by Henry I., by Stephen, and lastly by the present king himself.'² Of the second, he says that it 'was most certainly an innovation on ancient custom. It overturned the law, as it had invariably stood from the days of the Conqueror, and did not re-

¹ Mr. Berington's 'History of Henry II.', vol. i. p. 104.

² 'History of England,' pp. 66-68. Edit. 1854.

store the judicial process of the Anglo-Saxon dynasty.' The third and fourth he shows to have been innovations introduced by the Conqueror; while the fifth found its precedent in the reign of Henry I., and had eventually to be explained away, so far as its more stringent application was concerned.¹

¹ There are still those who imagine that all Henry's acts which claimed to vindicate the interests of law were of course themselves legal acts. Hume speaks thus of Clarendon:—‘The Barons were all gained to the king's party either by the reasons which he urged, or *by his superior authority*; the Bishops were overawed by the general combination against them’ (vol. ii. p. 32). That the Council of Northampton was no less overborne by the royal power he also says. After stating that the prosecution of Becket had proceeded from the king's disappointment and rage at the part the primate had taken against him, and that in his ‘violent prosecution’ there ‘entered more of passion than of justice, or even of policy,’ he proceeds:—‘The Barons, notwithstanding, in the great Council voted whatever sentence he was *pleased to dictate to them*; and the bishops themselves, who undoubtedly bore a secret favour to Becket, and regarded him as the champion of their privileges, concurred with the rest in the design of oppressing their primate’ (p. 38). Of Henry's subsequent proceedings he remarks:—‘These were edicts of the greatest importance, affected the lives and properties of all the subjects, and even *changed for the time the national religion* by breaking off all communication with Rome; yet were they enacted by the sole authority of the king, and were derived entirely from his will and pleasure’ (p. 48). Hume proceeds:—‘Principle, therefore, stood on the one side, power on the other; and if the English had been actuated by conscience more than by present

It is to be remembered that the ‘Royal Customs’ of the Norman kings, opposed as they were, both in letter and yet more in spirit, to the ancient laws of the land, yet never affected to abrogate them. Those sovereigns had frequently guaranteed the old laws, and could not afford such an admission as that their new Customs were inconsistent with them. The laws and the Customs made up conjointly a heterogeneous system. Henry’s way of introducing harmony into it was that of changing the Royal Customs into laws. The earlier laws, where opposed to the later, would thus have been indirectly superseded, and with them that large portion of the law of the Church which had for so long a time been recognised by the laws of the land, and to which Becket had referred when he declared that, for him to accept the eighth ‘Constitution,’ would be an act of perjury, since, on receiving the pallium, he had sworn to maintain

interest, the controversy must soon, by the general defection of Henry’s subjects, have been decided against him.’

A crowd of similar admissions might be quoted from authorities favourable to Henry, like Hume. Surely, then, it is neither generous nor just to attribute to faction Becket’s hostility to changes thus worked.

'Appeals to the Holy See.' The jurisprudence of ages was thus to vanish in a moment. Alfred and Edward the Confessor were to be forgotten; and England was henceforth to date her moral and political existence from the Conqueror. Had this enterprise succeeded, the England we have known could never have existed.

On the character of Henry's Church policy Mr. Hurrell Froude makes a remark similar to Hume's. 'It was one,' he says, 'which, if adopted, would have placed the relations of Church and State on a footing not very different from that which was arranged four hundred years after under Henry VIII.' Those who approve most the revolution of the sixteenth century would disclaim the belief that, in the twelfth century, when no man in England dreamed of making private judgment his rule of faith, it would have been either just or wise to substitute the civil authority in religion for the spiritual. They would probably think that a change which stamped out all spiritual liberty, and reduced religion to formality, must destroy alike the moral life of the present and the hopes of the future. At all events, thus to change a nation's

religion ‘over its head’ by the will of a king would have been an innovation; and to resist such a procedure was simply to resist innovation.

From the first the ‘Royal Customs’ had constituted an aggression, and as such had often been withheld; but that aggression, when Henry began his war upon the liberties of the Church, assumed a character wholly new. This resulted from two important circumstances. 1st. Till that time those Customs had been fragmentary things; it was now proposed to add to them whatever was necessary for their completeness, and organise them into one great, harmonious whole. In the second place, concessions, when made to the Customs, had in past times not been made as of *right*. The principle at issue had never been conceded. It was to be conceded now, and that with the consent of the clergy. It was demanded of Becket, ‘Why cannot you do what you admit was sometimes done by your predecessors?’ His reply was that some of these had indeed conceded more than was right; but that of none, except St. Anselm, had that demand been made which was made of him. He was not urged to waive, on occasion, some

immemorial right : he was commanded to acknowledge that the Church possessed no such right—that from the first it had been an imposture. Becket was one of those who held the royal authority very high ; and to a just king he would gladly have conceded whatever did not endanger religion. In condemning the ‘ Constitution ’ that no bishop should leave the kingdom without the king’s license, he had affirmed that it was right to apply for the king’s leave before their departure, but that to bind themselves by an oath to do so always was wrong. The Pope also said that six of the Customs, although objectionable, yet might be conceded. But a compromise would not have suited Henry. The Church, retaining its ancient faith, was to become a simple function of the State. It was conscience which required a faithful Churchman to resist that revolution. It may be urged that faith was not directly at issue. The same defence might be made for an arbitrary change which forced the celibacy of the clergy on a Protestant, or Episcopacy on a Presbyterian community.

It was a question of the English Constitution as well as of religion. Before the days of Clarendon

a Council had sat at Westminster, and this matter had then been brought to issue. ‘He [Henry] required a promise that they [the bishops] would in all things observe his Royal Customs. After consultation, St. Thomas answered that he and his brethren would do so, *saving their Order*. The king, enraged at the condition, put the same question to the other bishops, and received the same answer from all, except Hilary of Chichester. . . . St. Thomas pleaded that in his oath of fealty he had sworn to give him “earthly honour, *saving his Order*,” and that in the term “earthly honour” the Royal Customs were included ; that the condition “*saving his Order*” was universal throughout Christendom, and that he would not depart from it.’¹ The king would hear of no exception : it was inconsistent with his idea of monarchy that any great estate within his realm should thus be regarded as of old—that is, as an independent order possessing inherent rights, and bound to defend and transmit them. A corresponding attempt to exclude from the oath of fealty taken by his Barons the limitation ‘*saving their Order*’ would at once

¹ Canon Morris, ‘Hist.’ p. 97.

have been regarded by them as an attempt to enslave them.

Nearly at the close of Becket's career the same question arose once more. At that last great crisis, the meeting of the two kings at Montmirail, 'St. Thomas had proposed to substitute for the phrase "saving his Order" a reservation less likely to give umbrage to pride, viz. "saving God's honour."' The king refused the concession. The 'rights of conscience' seemed to him as dangerous as the rights of an Order. 'St. Thomas reminded the king that the oath of fidelity contained the clause "saving my Order," on which he rose in anger, and withdrew.'¹

There was another oath besides that of fealty which stood in Henry's way—the coronation oath. In taking that oath the sovereign swore to maintain the 'liberty of the Church.' At that time no doubt existed as to the quarter from which the Church might fear an aggression on her liberty. The king had his own way of meeting the difficulty. When he crowned his son, that clause in the coronation oath was omitted ; and an opposite

¹ Canon Morris, 'Hist.', pp. 245-7.

engagement was contracted.¹ It is only when we take these things fairly into account, that we can understand the career of Becket.

His character was one admirably suited to the struggle which he had to sustain. We find in it the warrior's 'plain heroic magnitude of mind,' with the guilelessness of the child. In youth he had an undue love of worldly splendour, although his moral purity had ever remained unstained; and he condemned that error openly at a later time, as he publicly did penance for what he considered a great sin—the promise which, under extraordinary pressure, and deceived by extraordinary frauds, he had made at Clarendon.² He was impetuous in

¹ This change in the coronation oath is denied by some. It was affirmed by Becket in his letters, and by the Pope in his sentence on the officiating Bishops. An old historian wholly on Henry's side characterises the act as 'not more temerarious than unfortunate,' but remarks that 'it was done in contempt of Becket,' and 'with some advantage also towards the perpetuation of the Avital Customs, and that also without scruple of conscience, his son, receiving the crown without caution to preserve the Church's liberty, either by him put in, or by others exacted: yea, rather an oath ministered, and by the young king taken, to maintain those Avital Customs to the uttermost' (Speed's 'History of Great Britain,' edit. 1632, p. 493).

² Lord Lyttelton states, in his 'History of Henry II.,' that when Becket, before the meeting of the Council at Clarendon, was

temper, but he was humble also, and required his dependants to address him with the same entire frankness which he himself used with all, from the lowest to the highest. He was, though a firm defender of the Church's rights when assailed, by no means a one-sided man. The fanatics of his day called him secular in his views. In his estimate the State stood at a height immeasurably more exalted than that commonly claimed for it in our days : but there is a comparative as well as an absolute greatness ; and he believed also that that Christian religion which raises the nations, must ever itself remain, for their sake, as well as from inherent necessity, exempt from their control. Above all, Becket was a man of passionate and constant affections. He never ceased to love the king, and Mr. Freeman maintains that the king too remembered old friendship. Occasionally, at least, he did so ; and perhaps that affection returned determined to resist the Royal Customs, the Papal Almoner ' pretended he had orders from his Holiness to persuade him to obey the will of the king ; in which, I imagine, he went beyond his commission. . . . Probably the Almoner was gained by the king, who often negotiated more successfully with the Pope's ministers than he could with the Pope, and would doubtless exert, on this occasion, his *utmost liberality*.'

to him in power after Becket's death, and prompted his repeated visits to the martyr's grave. Mr. Freeman remarks :—‘Henry, there can be little doubt, was kept up to his opposition by men who hated Thomas far more than he did.’¹ The bishops, even the better ones, for the most part disliked him, from their natural repugnance to see a man of his early life and conversation so strangely exalted over their heads. Ruffians like the De Brocs were actuated by the motives common to men of their stamp in all ages. The higher and better class of the laity, men like the Earls of Arundel and Leicester, oppose Thomas with deep sorrow.’ What follows is also full of discernment :—‘His great qualities were an ardent and impetuous spirit, a practical energy which carried everything before him, an admirable versatility which could adapt itself to all circumstances and all people, and a lofty sense of duty which could support him under any amount of adversity and disappointment. His

¹ Though several of Becket's contemporaries affirmed that Henry had planned the murder of Becket, we should, I think, attribute this impression to the excited state of their feelings. There seems nothing to justify the belief that either the king or John of Oxford could have lent himself to such a crime.

faults were chiefly an exaggeration of his virtues. His impetuosity often grew into needless and injudicious violence; his strong will continually degenerated into obstinacy. . . . Duplicity, conscious bad faith, were utterly alien to his nature.'

This testimony to Becket's absolute honesty concurs with that generally given by writers the most opposed to him. An exception is to be found in Lord Lyttelton, who was led astray by the credulous reliance he placed on a document at variance, as he admits, with all other testimony, ancient or modern, and bearing the name of Becket's great enemy, Gilbert Foliot.¹ I have referred to this charge at the end of the volume.²

¹ Mr. Hurrell Froude thus describes Gilbert Foliot : *—‘Gilbert Foliot, it seems, though wrapped in a hair shirt, and reposing on a bed of straw, felt the charms of home as strongly, and was as little disposed to sacrifice peace for principle, as though he had been spell-bound amid the softer enchantments of domestic blessedness. Few as were the charms which earth possessed for him, yet those few could place him within the power of circumstances, and undermine the independence of his character. What he could have been deprived of was but “one morsel of bread,” and yet to save that he sold his birthright.’ John of Salisbury thus described the

* Froude's ‘Remains,’ vol. ii. p. 45 (‘History of the Contest,’ &c.)

² See note in p. 257.

By the English people Becket was venerated, we must remember, not as one who had striven to make a revolution, just or unjust, but as one who had resisted revolution. That judgment was reaffirmed when the claims of kings in spiritual matters were at their highest, and by the prelate who has been claimed as the chief supporter of those claims, Bossuet. Of Henry he speaks thus:—

‘Henri second, roi d’Angleterre, se déclare l’ennemi school to which Mr. H. Froude regards Gilbert as belonging:— ‘These are the men who, if any stain have been fixed on the Church, whilst they are travelling abroad, discover it to the public eye, that they themselves may appear free from all stain. These are the men who persuade those in power that, on account of the faults of individuals, the Church should be deprived of her rights.’ Again, he says:—‘Thence it is that they exhibit paleness in their countenances, that they heave deep sighs from habit, that they are suddenly suffused with artful and ready tears; with their head stiff, their eyes half shut, their hair short, their head close-shaven, their voice low, their lips quick from prayer.’ Of Gilbert, John of Salisbury says, that out of envy he had calumniated the appointment of Becket to the see of Canterbury; but that, notwithstanding, when the bishops confirmed the election, his voice had been the loudest. But in John of Oxford Becket had an enemy who resorted to arts of which Gilbert could not have been guilty. In a conference with the Empress Matilda he endeavoured, as far as we can judge from Lord Lyttelton’s statement, to poison her mind against Becket by assertions or insinuations too revolting to be repeated, respecting which that historian remarks, ‘This was certainly a most unjust and malignant defamation of not only an innocent, but laudable act’ (‘Hist. of Henry II.,’ vol. ii. p. 490).

de l'Eglise. Il l'attaque au spirituel et au temporel ; en ce qu'elle tient de Dieu, et en ce qu'elle tient des hommes : il *usurpe ouvertement sa puissance*. Il met la main dans son trésor, qui enferme la subsistance des pauvres. Il flétrit l'honneur de ses ministres par l'abrogation de leurs priviléges, *et opprime leur liberté* par des lois qui lui sont contraires. . . . Il n'y a plus que le saint archevêque de Cantorbéry qu'il n'a pu encore ni corrompre par ses caresses, ni abattre par ses menaces.¹ Such was Henry in the judgment of this great assertor of the 'Regale.' With him Becket was 'le premier martyr de la discipline.'² He affirms that, while firm in resisting wrong, he was neither rebellious, nor factious, nor forgetful of the king's interest. 'S'il a toujours songé qu'il étoit évêque, il n'a jamais oublié qu'il étoit sujet ; et la charité pastorale animoit de telle sorte toute sa conduite, qu'il ne s'est opposé au pécheur que dans le dessin de sauver le roi.'³ He insists that Becket never allowed injustice to drive him into revolt,

¹ Bossuet, 'Panégyrique de St. Thomas de Cantorbéry,' vol. xvi. p. 586, edit. 1816.

² Ibid. p. 580.

³ Ibid. p. 594.

and that he conquered by his martyrdom. Such, he says, is the duty of the Church. It receives great benefits from the State, and it confers on the State benefits greater still. If commanded to violate duty, it disobeys, but it endures. ‘La force, selon le monde, s'étend jusqu'à entreprendre ; la force, selon l'Eglise, ne va pas plus loin que de tout souffrir.’¹

In recent times another eminent French prelate has written a life of Becket²—a prelate, like Bossuet, recently claimed as their especial representative by those attached to ‘Gallican’ opinions—the late Archbishop of Paris, murdered by the ‘Commune.’ His conclusions are the same as those of Bossuet :—‘Il suit de là que Thomas Becket, en s'opposant aux prétentions d'Henri II., lutta pour la loi, le droit, la justice’ (p. 241). The place which he claims for him is that of the patriot and benefactor of mankind, as well as that of the Christian bishop—a place among those ‘qui ont lutté contre les passions de leur époque pour le salut de le nôtre,

¹ Bossuet, ‘Panégyrique,’ &c., p. 599.

² ‘Saint Thomas Becket : sa Vie et ses Lettres.’ Par M. G. Darboy.

et servi l'Eglise pour assurer la bonheur de l'humanité.'

In looking back on the remote past, we are apt to contemplate things from a modern 'point of view,' and therefore to see them in a false perspective, separating things essentially one, and uniting things dissimilar, nay opposed. The twelfth century, though a great age, was one in which great corruptions prevailed, ecclesiastical as well as civil; but ecclesiastical purity, so far from being one with the domination claimed by Henry, was absolutely inconsistent with it. The great reformer of clerical abuses was Becket himself; and exalted indeed would have been the fame of Henry if he had used his powers in assisting Becket to make reforms, not in multiplying the abuses he condemned, by the abuse of patronage, and by keeping the great sees vacant. Again, the wealth of the Church and her power have been often identified. But overgrown wealth is nearly the greatest calamity which can befall a Church, and especially the greatest source of weakness; and if Henry had endeavoured by just means to prevent

its inordinate increase, he would have benefited religion not less than his country. In such an attempt would Becket have assisted him? I know not; yet there were great thinkers then living, like John of Salisbury, who would have done so. But Henry had no objection to the increase of Church wealth. The waters were thus collected into wells, to which king and baron had access. King Edward I., of whom Mr. Green well says, 'his conception of kingship was that of a just and religious Henry II.', passed the first statute to prevent the indefinite accretion of ecclesiastical estates. He passed other laws on ecclesiastical subjects which have been differently regarded by critics of different schools; but they were not forced upon intimidated councils; and while they touched matters of finance and of administration, they waged no war against the liberties of the Church.

Before, as well as during, the reign of Edward, a steady and glorious progress towards liberty had been made; but it had not been made through the reduction of the Baronage or the enslavement of the Church. The barons had ceased to be either the mimics or the creatures of foreign despots.

'They had won English liberty by their swords, and the popular trust in their fidelity to its cause was justified by the tradition of their order, which bound them to look on themselves as its natural guardians.'¹ Not less helpful to that cause had been the English clergy, to so many of whom, such as St. Edmund and Grossetete, an eloquent tribute is paid by Professor Stubbs, in his recent volume, as to men zealous for the rights of the people, and, while faithful to their Church, yet the patriotic enemies of encroachment and abuse.² It was through the aid of these two estates that Edward was enabled to carry out his great work of constitutional progress; and it was no less through their united opposition that he was compelled to desist from arbitrary exactions. On the other hand, after the ancient Baronage had been all but destroyed in the Wars of the Roses, and when the moral influence of the Clergy had proportionately decreased, owing doubtless in part to the abuses connected with excessive wealth, and in part to other causes, then it was that arbitrary

¹ Green's 'History of the English People,' p. 196.

² 'Const. Hist.,' vol. ii. pp. 299-303.

monarchy sprang up renewed under Edward IV. and consummated its work under the Tudors. A Tudor despotism established three centuries earlier might have lasted as long as an Oriental despotism, and perished to bequeath, not liberty, but anarchy. It was otherwise ruled. When its throne was fixed, a people stood behind it in the shadow ; and liberty was reached—though reached only through Rebellion, and Revolution. But that people only existed because, during the long struggle which substituted true parliaments and English kings for servile councils and foreign despots, the Clergy and the Baronage had held their own, and contributed their part to the vindication of municipal right and the claims of industry. That struggle had been fought on the platform of the old Saxon laws.

While estimating those strong-headed and strong-handed kings, the two earlier Henrys, we are apt to forget that in them there were blended a higher and a lower aim. Edward I. was a grave-hearted, virtuous, truthful, and seriously patriotic man. Henry I. ‘cared too little for them [his people], to pretend to love them, and feared them

too little to take pains to propitiate them ;¹ and his grandson was not more disinterested. Each was a great legislator, and a part of the work bequeathed by each entered largely into the English Constitution. But each came from a fierce stock, lived in a fierce age, and rushed forward to his ends by the nearest paths, resolved to trample down whatever stood in his way. In this, fortunately for their fame, they failed. Law may be either the shield of freedom or an iron mace in the hand of a power that fells whatever dares to lift up an unbending head ; and merely wanton and lawless tyranny is less formidable than tyranny which evades even an indirect responsibility. When the enthusiastic admirers of the two earlier Henrys remind us how much England owes to them, they speak but half the truth. They should remark rather on the benefits bequeathed by a Henry I. *plus* an Anselm, and by a Henry II. *plus* a Becket. Those two prelates conferred on the kings who persecuted them the greatest of all boons ; they eradicated the evil those kings had sown, and thus enabled their good to grow up and bear fruit. They found

¹ Professor Stubbs's 'Constitutional History,' vol. i. p. 318.

their vindication in ‘Magna Carta.’ That charter embodies the best legislation of the two Henries ; but it begins by re-affirming the old charters, and the old laws to which Becket had appealed, secures the free election of bishops, and proclaims once more the great principle ‘*Quod Anglicana Ecclesia libera sit.*’ At the head of those who won that charter stood Stephen Langton. With him, with Anselm, and with that great line of lion-hearted prelates who so long made Canterbury renowned throughout the world, Becket has a place. It is unjust to single out for exceptional censure or half-hearted praise one alone among them—that one who loved the king before whom he would not crouch, and who witnessed for his faith in his blood.

THOMAS À BECKET

B

Dramatis Personæ.

ENGLISH.

HENRY PLANTAGENET, *King of England.*
PRINCE HENRY, *son of Henry II.*
RICHARD DE LUCI, *Chief Justiciary of England.*
EARL OF LEICESTER.
EARL OF CORNWALL.
DE BROC, *an apostate monk become knight.*
THOMAS À BECKET, *Archbishop of Canterbury.*
JOHN OF SALISBURY, } *priests and friends of Becket.*
HERBERT OF BOSHAM, }
ALEXANDER LLEWELLEN, *a Welshman, his cross-bearer.*
WILLIAM FITZ-STEPHEN, *a retainer of Becket.*
HENRY OF BLOIS, *brother of King Stephen, and Bishop of Winchester.*
ROGER DE PONT L'EVÈQUE, *Archbishop of York.*
GILBERT FOLIOT, *Bishop of Hereford, and afterwards of London.*
JOHN OF OXFORD, *a priest, and Secretary to Henry II.*
SCAILMAN, *a lay brother.*
REGINALD FITZ-URSE, WILLIAM DE TRACY, RICHARD BRITO, HUGH DE MOREVILLE, *knights in the King's household.*
EDWARD GRIM, *a Cambridge clerk.*
THE PRIOR OF MERTON.

FRENCH.

LOUIS, *King of France.* THE ARCHBISHOP OF ROUEN.
THE ARCHBISHOP OF SENS. THE BISHOP OF LISIEUX.
GUARINE, *Abbot of Pontigny.*

ITALIAN.

POPE ALEXANDER III. CARDINAL WILLIAM OF PAVIA.
CARDINAL OTHO.

WOMEN.

THE EMPRESS MATILDA, *mother of Henry II.*
QUEEN ELEANOR, *wife of Henry II.*
IDONEA DE LISLE, *a nun.*
Monks, courtiers, soldiers, minstrels, attendants, &c.



ACT I.

SCENE I.—THE WESTERN ENTRANCE TO WEST-MINSTER ABBEY.

LEICESTER and CORNWALL, JOHN OF SALISBURY, HERBERT OF BOSHAM. *Beyond is a crowd waiting outside the Abbey, within which the monks of St. Augustine's at Canterbury have just made election of THOMAS A BECKET to the Primacy.*

HERBERT.

Archbishop of the church of Canterbury,
'Rome of the North' well named ! Give God the
praise !

The man I love stands honoured.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

England's honoured !

Thomas is English wholly—Saxon half ;
A scion of that ancient, healthful stock
Which fell on Hastings' field ; the first, moreover,
Who for five reigns hath swayed Augustine's staff.
King Harold, have thy joy !

LEICESTER.

Our king is wise ;
 King Henry, of that name the first, espoused
 A daughter of the Saxon line—Matilda,
 That English blood, with Norman mixed, thenceforth
 Might comfort English hearts. King Henry's grandson
 Walks in his grandsire's steps, throning this day
 A London merchant's son.

CORNWALL.

With better luck,
 Pray God ! than Beauclerk's—the Investitures ;
 Anselm, the primate, fought that battle hard,
 Stretching from exile a lean, threatening arm,
 And won it more than half. At Bec he lies,
 Or England ne'er had slept. I think he sleeps not ;
 I think that in his grave the stern old monk,
 Who looked so meek and mild, keeps vigil still,
 Muttering of simony and sins of princes.
 The king did well to choose a citizen's son :
 'T is that which makes this brutish city loud ;
 Yet safer far had been a humbler choice—
 Becket hath Norman blood.

LEICESTER.

What matters that ?
 Norman and Saxon daily blend in England :

The king is neither. Sir, he 's Angevine :
His faithfullest subjects we ; not less we know him
Of alien race—an alien emperor
Who counts our England 'mid his subject realms,
And seldom sees her face. Remember, Cornwall,
That, when that earlier Henry sware, new-crowned,
To grant this land once more the laws of Alfred,
Not Saxon churl alone desired the boon,
But Norman knight no less. Forget not this :
Matilda—how unlike her empress-daughter !—
Was saint with either race, and won her lord
To hold his parliaments. The king and she
Walked side by side when Alfred's bones were moved
From Newminster to Hyde.

CORNWALL.

'T is true ; this Becket
Shares not the scandal of that foreign brood
Which swarms through all the realm's great offices ;
Preys on our lands. A Norman was his sire ;
Some say his mother was an Asian princess,
Who loved that father chained in Holy Land,
Loosed him, and with him fled.

LEICESTER.

Likelier I deem it
She cut her flaxen Saxon tresses short,

And followed him to Syria, garbed a page,
With cross upon her shoulder, and a heart
Made strong by maiden love.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Brave legends both !

They mean that Becket 's great. Whate'er hath
greatness
Kindles some legend round its onward way
Through the gross ether of the popular mind.
Becket 's a man !

CORNWALL.

A merchant's son—not noble !

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Patriarch is he of nobles, not their son—
The nobles 'mid the shepherds of Christ's flock :
Let that suffice.

LEICESTER.

Whate'er his race, 't was merit
Raised Becket's head. But three months chancellor,
He scourged those boors of Flanders from the realm ;
Shook down the bandits' towers above the builders :
So plainly his desert shone forth, that Envy
Bit her own tongue reviling him. Great knights
Flocked to his standard ; sons of nobles stood
His pages in the splendour of his halls.

His ways were royal : when he crossed the seas
To vindicate 'gainst France our England's name,
Six ships of his own building with him sailed,
And sixteen hundred warriors ate his bread ;
The chivalry of Aquitaine and Anjou,
Of Scotland, Brittany, yea, England's self,
Stared at the steel-mailed cleric.

HERBERT.

Sir, a deacon—

A deacon only, not a priest.

LEICESTER.

Once more

I see that French knight, Engelramme de Trie,
Upon the red field rolling—

(GILBERT FOLIOT, attended by JOHN OF OXFORD, issues from
the Abbey.)

CORNWALL.

Hush ! here 's Gilbert—

I hate that sallow face and inward eye—
And, with him, John of Oxford, courtier-priest,
That, round and ready, slips and slides through all
things,
And ever upward works. Leicester, come hence !
To Rouen next : we 'll bring the king the tidings.

[Cornwall and Leicester depart.

GILBERT.

A cure miraculous, John, the king has worked ;
 Touches a soldier, and a bishop rises :
 The hand that cures the evil gives the staff !

JOHN OF OXFORD.

My lord, the staff is given ; the evil, long,
 Transferred, not cured, shall plague the heart of
 England.

GILBERT.

I see in yonder man a strength resistless ;
 A strength for ill. In washing of the dirt
 From off the Church, he 'll wash the Church to nothing.
 I preached against her sins—there were who said
 I bit them hard ; he 'll rend away the rags
 With shreds of flesh adhering. Next, he 'll loose
 The spiritual body from the secular clutch ;—
 Let princes look to that.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Patience he lacks ;
 Victory half won, he 'll dash himself to death.

GILBERT.

There 's in him strength to wrest from death itself
 Victory, when all seems lost.

[*Gilbert and John pass on.*

FIRST MAN-AT-ARMS.

If they deceive the great, they deceive not the simple. Gilbert is twice Roger's height, and but half his bulk ; yet it is envy, not his fasts, that wasteth him. Though he is mortified, yet he is sycophant. If the king bade him eat a babe new baptized, he would eat it for its soul's sake, and say grace.

SECOND MAN-AT-ARMS.

To hear them talk—the nobles and the priests—each finding a reason for the promotion of Thomas ! I know the reason, for I was there. When our king and the French king were last at war, the longer each looked at his brother the uglier he thought him. Then was devised this counsel—to marry together their two children, our Prince Henry, then five years old, and their Princess Marguerite, then three. Thomas, being lord chancellor, was sent to Paris to fetch home the bride. There stood I that day, and gave glory to God.

FIRST MAN-AT-ARMS.

What saw you ?

SECOND MAN-AT-ARMS.

Of his own household there were two hundred —clerics and knights—chanting hymns. Then

followed his hounds—ten couples. Next came eight waggons with five horses each, and each bearing eight casks of wine. After them followed other waggons : the first bare the chancellor's wardrobe, the second his pantry, the third his kitchen, the fourth the furniture for his chapel ; the fifth his books, his gold plate, and infinite silver crowns. Under every waggon there walked an English mastiff, bound. Then followed twelve sumpter-horses. The esquires bare the shields, and the falcohers the hawks on their fists ; after whom came those that held the banners ; and last, my lord on a milk-white horse. Princesses gazed from the windows, and nuns peered through their grates : and they of France muttered as he passed, ‘If this be England’s chancellor, what is her king?’ Thomas gave gifts to all—to the princes, and the clergy, and the knights, and to the poor more than to the rich—to one a palfrey, and to one a gold brooch, and to one a jewel. When he feasted the beggars, he bade them take with them the gilded spoons, and the goblets ; and the dish of eels which my lord supped on that night cost a hundred marks. God honoured him because he loved the poor ; and I knew he would be exalted.

[*They pass on.*

SCENE II.—A HOUSE IN LONDON.

BECKET, HERBERT OF BOSHAM.

BECKET.

A heavy weight, good Herbert, and a sudden !

HERBERT.

My lord, it came from heaven ; what need we more ?
Who sent the weight will send the strength. That bard
Whose Trojan legend was the old world's Bible
Clothed his best Greek with armour from the Gods,
And o'er the field it bore him like a wind.
What meant that armour ? Duty ! O my lord,
The airy gauds that deck us, these depress us :
The divine burthen, and the weight from God,
Uplift us and sustain.

BECKET.

Herbert ! my Herbert !

High visions, mine in youth, upbraid me now :
I dream of sanctities redeemed from shame ;
Abuses crushed ; all sacred offices
Reserved for spotless hands. God's house, God's
kingdom
I see so bright that every English home,
Sharing that glory, glitters in its peace.

I see the clear flame on the poor man's hearth
 From God's own altar lit ; the angelic childhood ;
 The chaste, strong youth ; the reverence of white
 hairs :—

'T is this Religion means. O Herbert ! Herbert !
 Had I foreseen, with what a vigilant care
 Had I built up my soul ! The fall from greatness
 Had tried me less severely. Many a time
 I said, 'From follies of these courts and camps
 Reverse will scourge me homeward to my God !'
 Lo ! greatness comes, not judgment.

HERBERT.

It may be
 That God hath sent you both in one. Fear nought !
 At Paris first, and after at Bologna,
 You learned the Church's lore ; with Theobald,
 In his pontifc court, advanced therein ;—
 Time lost can be redeemed.

BECKET.

Give we, each day,
 Six hours to sacred studies ! Ah ! you smile ;
 You note once more the boaster. Friend, 't is true,
 Our penitence itself doth need repentance ;
 Our humbleness hath in it blots of pride.
 Hark to that truant's song ! We celibates

Are strangely captured by this love of children ;
Nature's revenge—say, rather, compensation.
The king will take him hence. God's will be done !
I lose my pupil, and become your pupil ;
A humble one—no more.
High saint of God, or doctor of the Church,
'T were late for that ; yet something still remains :
I ever wished to live an honest man—
Honest to all, and most to Christ, my Master.
Help me in this !

HERBERT.

I promise.

BECKET.

Worldly pomps,
We said last night, are death to zeal divine.
The king must find some worthier chancellor.
It irks me thus to slight his gifts ; yet John,
Who journeys with the prince, must bear to France,
With these my missives, and a subject's duty,
His realm's Great Seal.

(PRINCE HENRY enters.)

The swallow, little Prince,
Can twitter, though he sings not : so can you,
That, like the swallow, with you waft the spring.

PRINCE HENRY.

Better his twitter than the organ's growl :
Vespers are done ; that 's well !

BECKET.

They say, my child,
Those Canterbury monks have made me primate ;
I little like the charge.

PRINCE HENRY.

Why take it then ?
I spurned this day a shoe, though wrought in pearl,
Because it galled me—aye, and left a stain
Upon the maker's cheek ! The chancellor's gown
Was gayer thrice than that. You have changed for
worse.

BECKET.

High place hath many foes.

PRINCE HENRY.

When father dies,
I shall be king : that day I 'll find and slay them !

BECKET.

Child, love you not your father ?

PRINCE HENRY.

Lo ! you frown !
I love my father, but I love you better.

Not oft he speaks to me, nor then with smiles :
He knows no pretty tales of birds and beasts ;
He never lays his hand upon my head ;
Hard are his questions ; ere the answer comes
He sits in cloud, or leaves me.

BECKET.

Little Prince,

It may be when the cloud is on his brow
His thought is for his son ! Know you not, Henry,
A father's heart is with his babes ? For them
He toils all day ; for them keeps watch by night ;
Risks oft his soul itself. See you this letter ?
It bids me send you home. We part at sunrise.

PRINCE HENRY.

I will not go ! I 'll stay with you in London !
Hark, hark, the light hoofs dancing in the court :
Long-maned, large-eyed, a white star on his front—
They said he was so gentle, I could ride him :
I answered I would ride him mild or wild.
Father, farewell !

[*Rushes out.*

BECKET.

Farewell, light heart ! Man's life
Loses its speciousness : remains but Duty.

SCENE III.—PALACE AT ROUEN.

KING HENRY, QUEEN ELEANOR, the BISHOP OF LISIEUX,
CORNWALL, REGINALD FITZ-URSE, *Courtiers, Min-*
strels, Attendants.

KING HENRY.

Three victories in three realms had pleased me less !
This day my ten years' purpose stands fulfilled :
Those monks have given consent ! Thomas Arch-
bishop—
That hand which holds the seal, wielding the staff,—
The feud of Crown and Church henceforth is past.
My chancellor made primate, Henry of Blois
Shall bend from his stiff back.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

Have joy, good husband !
The gift of faith is yours !

KING HENRY.

You trust in none ;
I, trusting few, trust Thomas ; I have proved him.
Those sins my youth had not the grace to shun,
At least it scorned to vindicate. Who chid them ?
Nor knight, nor bishop ;—he and he alone !
You scorn your one true friend.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

Hear that, fair ladies !

A spouse unfaithfuller still——

KING HENRY.

Henceforth I rule !

None shares with me my realm. My Lord of Lisieux,
Should not a king be king ?

LISIEUX.

May it please your Highness,

"T is known I never walked with them that err
From duty to their king. Yet kings—forgive me—
Armed with that twofold power your Highness boasts,
Shall need a sage's prudence.

KING HENRY.

Have no fear !

That twofold sway my own, the world shall wonder
Less at its greatness than the temperance meek
Wherewith I wield its functions.

LISIEUX.

Sire, 't is thus

Your Church shall serve you best. The garden dial
Is lawful appanage of the garden's lord ;
Yet he who wills to plant it at incline,
And he who scans it by his private taper,
Knows not the hour o' the day.

KING HENRY.

My kingdom's bishops
 Shall keep full power to mulct ill clerks ; and Rome,
 Albeit reduced, retain her vantage-place—
 The loftiest tassel on the Church's cap.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

What cap is that ? In Guienne some would answer
 'A fool's cap on a palsy-stricken head.'
 O, 't is a beauteous and a beaming land !
 I ever hated Paris ! There that monk,
 Bernard, held sway ; but in my sunny South,
 Strong as the North in arms, and wiser thrice,
 'T was banquet still, and song. 'Mysteries' and
 'plays'
 Alternate graced our halls. Gay Troubadours !
 Amid our 'Courts of Love' I judged the prize—
 They sware my song was best !

KING HENRY.

Rise, Southern sea,
 And drown for aye that sun-burnt land of 'Oc !'
 An oak-wood of the North were worth it all !
 Your Troubadours have but one song among them,
 And that 's the grasshopper's ! Their garrulous land
 Scorns kings as much as priests ! Your grandfather

In spleen forsook it—lived in Spain, cave-roofed,
The knightly armour hid by hermit weeds,
And, worn by penance, died.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

A lying tale !

He revelled to the end, and died in sleep :
Heaven grant us all such end ! I tell you, Henry,
My land's a land of mind yet more than mirth,
Where men who wish your wish have longer sight.
There are who whisper there that marriage vows,
Like vows monastic, mean but priestly gain ;—
Poor Petronilla ! Rodolf loved her well :
What marred that love ? A dotard Pope, preferring
To theirs the claim of Rodolf's beldam wife,
Espoused in ignorant youth !

KING HENRY.

You fought their fight ;
And thirteen hundred boors were burnt, they say,
In Vitry's church, when Vitry fell.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

Which error

We cancelled, fighting in the Holy Land.
O, what a clime ! What flowers, what fruits, what
odours !
What stars, clear-imaged in those Asian streams—

That land hath but one blot—Jerusalem !
A city like a nightmare, legend-choked ;
Black den of Saints !

KING HENRY.

Your ‘ Amazons ’ and you,
Whose quaint apparel wonder-struck the world,
Ended, ere long, I think, that high crusade.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

When captains shape their march to please a lady,
The shame is theirs, not hers. ‘ T was frolic all,
And so in frolic died.

KING HENRY.

A frolic ! woman !

My earliest dream was of some great crusade ;
That work shall yet be mine—my last, my chief :
Aye, but I ’ll build my empire first ! That done,
My brave and loyal sons shall share my toils,
Or guard my realms at home.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

How chill ’t is grown
Swift Southern springs, that with a flame of flowers
In one day light the earth, how unlike you
This tardy Norman May ! See those poor monkeys !
Despite their coats of scarlet and of gold
They shake from ears to tail. Fitz-Urse, some music !

FITZ-URSE.

Madam, there stands a Trouvère !

QUEEN ELEANOR.

Let him sing.

Minstrel, what poems make you ?

TROUVÈRE.

Please your Highness,
The proud old pagan poets made their songs ;
We Trouvères find, not make them, deeming earth
God's poem, beauty-stored.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

Then find me one.

'TROUVÈRE *sings.*

I make not songs, but only find :
Love, following still the circling sun,
His carols casts on every wind,
And other singer is there none.

I follow Love, though far he flies ;
I sing his song, at random found,
Like plume some bird of Paradise
Drops, passing, on our dusky-bound.

In some, methinks, at times there glows
The passion of some heavenlier sphere :
These too I sing ; but sweetest those
I dare not sing, and faintly hear.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

That's psalm, not song ! Sing me some love-song old,
Of Grecian gods and nymphs.

TROUVÈRE.

On Grecian hills

Traditionary melodies survive,
Pagan, yet touched in part by tenderer feeling.
I know one—‘Phœbus and the Doe.’

QUEEN ELEANOR.

Sing that.

TROUVÈRE *sings.*

Phœbus paced the wooded mountains ;
Kindled dawn, and met a doe ;—
‘ Child, what ails thee that thou rovest
O'er my bright hills sad and slow ?

‘ That upon thy left side only
Thou thy noontide sleep dost take ;
That thy foot the fountain troubles
Ever ere thy thirst thou slake ? ’

Answered thus the weeping creature :
‘ Once beside me raced a fawn ;—
See'st her, O thou God all-seeing !
O'er thy hills, in wood or lawn ?

‘ On my left side sleep I only,
For 't is there my anguish stirs ;
And my foot the fountain troubles,
Lest it yield me shape like hers.’

—Then the Sun-God marvelled, musing,
‘ When my foolish Daphne died,
Rooted ’mid Peneian laurels,
Scarce one little hour I sighed.’

QUEEN ELEANOR.

A love-song that ! An icicle it is
Added to winter ! Phœbus was a fool,
Else had he captured Daphne ere she rooted ;
Your doe a fool to weep for gladness past.
What says King Henry ?

DE TRACY (*entering*).

May it please your Highness,
Four priests are come, sent by my lord the primate,
With letters and a casket.

KING HENRY.

Bid them enter.
Thomas has sent some offering !

(JOHN OF SALISBURY *enters, followed by three abbots.*)

QUEEN ELEANOR (*to one of her ladies*).

Lo, their saint !
Large fame is his, and long I craved to see him :
Princely he is, but lacks the princely pride ;
Rather some prince’s phantom—gaunt and wan ;—

Methinks that moon which maddens him looks
through him !

(JOHN OF SALISBURY *presents a letter to the king.*)

KING HENRY.

The casket first ! Belike a crown imperial !

QUEEN ELEANOR.

Not so ! A diamond necklace ; and for me !

(*She tears open the casket, out of which rolls the Great Seal of England.*)

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

This missive, sovereign liege, humbly sets forth
Those forceful, yet unwelcome counter-duties,
The exigence whereof compelled my lord——

KING HENRY.

To hurl at England's head England's Great Seal !
At last I know him ! Traitor !

(*He tears up the letter, and flings it on the fire.*)

Burn unread,

Foul web of lies ! Thou too, England's Great Seal,
Once type of justice and of law, this day
Spurned from the traitor's clutch that long defiled
thee !

Dishonour's badge ! poor clod of kneaded vileness !
I crush thee 'neath my feet !

(*He tramples on the Great Seal.*)

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

May it please your Highness —

KING HENRY.

Hence, lest I strike thee and thy fellows dead !
O sharp-toothed worm ! this heart it was that nursed
thee ; —

Lo, thou hast gnawed thy passage to the day !
Base churl, thou show'st at last thine English breed
And king-defying fierceness. Vengeance ! Vен-
geance !

'T was with a smile he said our love was past—
He 'll find my hate begun. Cornwall ! Fitz-Urse !
This night to England : — stay the consecration : —
Say that my will is changed.

SCENE IV.—LONDON ; HOUSE OF THE CHIEF
JUSTICIARY.

RICHARD DE LUCI, CORNWALL.

CORNWALL.

It was untoward, my lord, though done in duty :
The king is much in wrath.

DE LUCI.

His choice made wroth
 Augustine's monks : they love no seculars,
 Yet, hating Roger more, and Gilbert more,
 And jealous for a right so oft impugned,
 Elected Thomas. Thomas sought not greatness.
 But late I stood beside him and the king
 At Falaise, in a window which o'erlooks
 The pleasant Norman plains. The king turned sharp,
 And caught him by the arm, and spake, 'Get hence !
 Old Theobald is dead : fill thou his seat.'
 The chancellor smiled, and, lifting his gay sleeve,
 Replied, 'A saintly man your Highness seats
 Upon Augustine's chair ;' then added, sad,
 'Forbid it, heaven ! One month, and love, long tried,
 Would change to new-born hatred. Royal needs
 Prey on Church rights !' On me King Henry looked—
 'Richard, if on my bier I lay, stone-cold,
 Say, would'st thou throne my son ?' I answered
 'Yea ;'
 And he, 'Thus throne my friend at Canterbury !'

CORNWALL.

The king is changed. 'T is true he loved this Becket ;
 But more he trusted Becket's love for him,
 And for his royal pupil, young Prince Henry.

My lord, King Stephen, pressed by rivals, bowed
The sceptre to the crosier. Not so Henry !
He, in the purple born, from his great mother,
The Empress Maude, inherited by right
Both Normandy and Maine, and from his sire
Touraine and Anjou. Next, with Eleanor
He wedded Poitou, Limousin, Auvergne,
Saintonge, and Perigord, and Angoumois,
And Guienne's vine-clad plains. King Stephen died :
England was his ; and, with it, Europe's coasts
From Scottish shores to mountains of Navarre.
Shall this man be the beadsman of the Pope ?
Creedsman suffices !

DE BROC (*entering abruptly*).

God preserve your lordship !

DE LUCI.

Sir, you are welcome. Becket for the primate——

CORNWALL.

So, so ! you fetch me back : I had slipped my tether:
The king will have his Royal Customs rule,
Not Saxon laws, priest-hatched. His chancellor
primate,
He deemed his right secure ;—that dream is past :
Becket is chancellor no more.

DE LUCI.

That 's ill !

I ever marked an inner man in Thomas,
 That stirred within the outer. Burst he must,
 Or soon, or late, his bond.

CORNWALL.

The king misdoubts him,

And, till his will be signified, forbids
 The consecration rite.

DE LUCI.

The election 's made ;

And, being made in form, no law annuls it.

DE BRO. C.

Then take him, like a dog, and hang him up !
 That done, I find his crime.

DE LUCI.

The task befits you :

You know faults clerical. A monk one time,
 You cast your coat, and walked a secular ;—
 No fitter ferret for a cloistral warren !

DE BRO. C.

King's man am I ; nor traitor, nor a dupe
 That takes his stand on precedent.

DE LUCI.

Sir, you stand
In presence of this realm's Justiciary,
Who knows alike to vindicate old laws
And pluck from fraud its mask of loyal zeal.
You came unbidden ;—waste not time on us
If tasks are yours elsewhere.

DE BRO. C.

One task is mine—
To slay the man I hate ; and I will slay him !

[*Departs.*]

DE LUCI.

The air grows healthier now de Broc has left us :
That man 's a forest-beast no art can tame.
Three times my hand, with iron mace of law,
Hath spurned him to his den ; or else Idonea—
But you, long absent, know not that black fount
Which feeds his hate for Becket.

CORNWALL.

Tell his tale.

DE LUCI.

In youth his bad heart was a nest of adders,
Envenomed purposes and blind, at war :
A monk, on false pretence he burst his bond,

And roamed a-preying on the race of man.
Idonea next he met —

CORNWALL.

Idonea?

DE LUCI.

Her—

The sweetest blossom lit by English skies,
The tenderest of de Lisle's old stem. He met her,
And loved her with the malice of that love
Whose instinct is a craving less to enjoy
Than kill the saintly grace it yet admires ;—
Likewise the upstart loved her wealthy lands.
A prince had vainly wooed her ! From her childhood
The orphan in her brother lived ;—he died.
Like some young widow moonlight-pale, three years,
Daily she decked his grave, the same strange light
For ever in those never tearless eyes
Which dropped no tear. Then back old ardours
rushed :
She willed to be a nun.

CORNWALL.

What hindrance stayed her ?

DE LUCI.

She lived a royal ward. De Broc with bribes

Won certain near the king—Fitz-Urse, de Tracy—
To speed his wooing of the virgin-heiress.
Large nets he spread. Once, well-nigh trapped, she
sought
The friend of her dead mother, Becket's sister,
His dearest upon earth. That great man's name
Since then protects Idonea ; for which cause
(Poisoned beside by sin's insane suspicions) .
De Broc has vowed revenge. You have heard my tale:
Back to our theme. What think you of our Primate?
Frankly, I never liked the royal choice.

CORNWALL.

Whom would you choose ?

DE LUCI.

Not York : the world, my friend,
Needs not more worldly bishops. Poor sick world,
Methinks thy leech, the Church, hath caught thy fever !

CORNWALL.

There 's Gilbert !

DE LUCI.

Fanatic of old, and late
With courtier over-slimed. Sleekness like his
Sophisticates, not stays, the fight before us,

Makes slippery too the athlete's wrestling-floor.
I note in every country at this hour
A warfare 'twixt the men of mind and might,
The crosier and the sword ; these are two kingdoms,
In every kingdom front to front opposed,
Yet needing each the other.

CORNWALL.

Up, good sword,
And strike the crosier down !

DE LUCI.

Cornwall, that cry
Hath in it more of courtier than of statesman :
The crosier down, justice were driven from earth,
And chaos come again.

CORNWALL.

The Church is proud—
Clamours for freedom.

DE LUCI.

I was ne'er of those
Who deem such freedom but a maniac's knife
Threatening that maniac's throat. Be hers her
freedom:
Let kings reduce her pride. King Stephen's brother,

Henry of Winton, loves both Church and State ;
Plots not with bishops, fawns not upon kings ;
But higher sits than either—seeking nought.
Legate he was ; too near hath stood to popes
And monarchs both, to find, in either, gods :
Whichever wrongs the other he withstands :
I love that bishop well. If rich, he 's bounteous ;
Rides with a prince's retinue ;—what then ?
The people love him better for his pride,
Birth's honest pride—how different from the pride
Of upstart intellect, or of spiritual spleen !
'T is but a loftier terrace, whence to bend
More humbly on the humble.

CORNWALL.

Winton primate,

All had gone well !

DE LUCI.

Save to the scaffold's height,
King Henry ne'er had raised King Stephen's brother.

SCENE V.—A STREET IN LONDON.

LEICESTER, JOHN OF OXFORD.

LEICESTER.

Winton last week ordained a serf of mine ;
This day my serf is free. Be instant, John,
With Henry for the nobles ! Must we starve ?
Sir, we attend the king at heavy charge :
Concede to us but this—the presentations :
Shear we the shepherds ; shear who will the sheep.
Nobles must live !

JOHN OF OXFORD.

My lord, what power have I ?
Why seek you not my lord of York—or Gilbert,
God's saint and Henry's both ?

LEICESTER.

Know you de Broc ?
Fitz-Urse resounds his praise.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

I know him not :
Some inadvertency of youth, men said,
In part had smirched his boyish reputation,
Though bettered by desert in later years.

A priest perforce lives clean ; but you, I doubt not,
Shall find him good at need.

LEICESTER.

Your counsel, John ?

JOHN OF OXFORD.

My lord, your best of policy were this,
To have no policy, but watch events.
Stand still ! Your best advance shall help you less
Than stumbling of your foe.

LEICESTER.

Our foe is yours :

'T was Becket gave you first that name 'The Swearer.'

[*Leicester departs.*

JOHN OF OXFORD.

As if I knew not well that Becket scorns me !
I pay his scorn with hate. They need me ; aye,
What marvel ? Blind they are as bats, these nobles ;
While those who see—the cleric race—are mad,
And differ but in manner of their madness.
First, there's the Church's champion, like this Becket,
Who wins from her small thanks ; the prelate next,
Who softly struts, a spiritual king,
In miniver and gold, like Winton's Henry ;

Then he that, all too proud for pomps extern,
Grows thin with feeding on his self-conceit,
And sours with glances at his neighbour's gain ;
He who out-fasts the Church's fasts ; out-watches
Her vigils ; never coveted her thrones
Till wholer men possessed them. Gilbert, Gilbert !
A saint wert thou ! What hindered thee from running ?
Let Satan answer that ! The king is mine ;
That flame-eyed queen he hates will drive him on,
With none to guide him. I am scarce ambitious ;
But I was born beneath a politic star,
Was trained to walk in labyrinthine ways,
And needs must use my natural faculties.
The game !—'t is that I love ! O Gilbert, Gilbert !
Save that that faith ascetic, once thy boast,
Though dead by day, yet, spectre of itself,
Still leans, a dreadful nightmare, o'er thy bed,
How fair a game were thine !

SCENE VI.—THE EPISCOPAL PALACE AT ROCHESTER.

BECKET, JOHN OF SALISBURY.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Rouse not a sleeping lion ! More than once
He hath muttered in his sleep.

BECKET.

King Henry? Friend,
I imitate far off his great example :
Once king, his rights, king-like, he vindicated ;
At once he grasped those alienated lands,
And hurled the intruders forth.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Again I say it :
Await the king's attack ; provoke it not :
His anger I have seen—
The prince it was, not I, who charmed it from you.

BECKET.

The prince?

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Three hours I strove to soothe his rage,
The Great Seal lying on the ground before him ;
(Two days it lay there :—none had dared to lift it)
And strove in vain. I cried in my despair,
'Pride is the sin of kings ; that pride o'erflows
From them upon their babes, till heaven is forced,
For their soul's sake, to snatch them from this world.
Your grandsire had a son—but one—Prince William :
He from his sire had caught the haughty heart,
And oft in childhood sware, "When I am king,

These English boors, harnessed like ox or ass,
 Shall cleave the Norman's glebe ! " He ne'er was king :
 The great waves o'er him closed ! ' While thus I spake
 The prince ran by ; his father's eye pursued him :—
 That hour his heart was changed.

BECKET.

I hold a trust.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Sustain the freedom of the Church : its lands,
 If lost long since, let be.

BECKET.

I will not suffer

The meanest stone in castle, grange, or mill,
 The humblest clod of English earth, one time
 A fief of my great mother, Canterbury,
 To rest a caitiff's booty.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Then, my lord,

Beware de Broc ! Kinsman is he, and friend
 Of John the Marshal, and his mate in sins.
 There 's not a bandit in the south coast woods
 But knows his castle's gate ; there 's not a pirate
 But in its vaults secretes a blood-bought spoil.
 De Broc 's like him who, ignorant of fence,

Or mad with pain, against all rules of fence
In dashes o'er the wariest warrior's guard,
And, witless, slays the best.

BECKET.

You have heard it, John,
My pupil shall attend my consecration !
I owe that joy to you ! Farewell, my friend.

[*John of Salisbury departs.*

Herbert and John—how wise is each ; how kind !
How few have friends like these ! Yet something
tells me
That neither will be near me when I die.

SCENE VII.—SALTWOOD CASTLE, NEAR THE COAST.

FITZ-URSE, DE BROC.

FITZ-URSE.

You sware to kill him, yet your hand is vestal ;
Vestal as hers—

DE BROC.

Name not that name ! Her father—
Her father 't was she called him. O, the jest !

Three years have passed since then :—I said at parting,
 ‘ That small, white hand shall dig that father’s grave ! ’

FITZ-URSE.

You sware——

DE BROC.

Enough ! your king is ceremonious :
 Besides, he hates him ~~half~~, and half admires :
 This John of Oxford told me.

FITZ-URSE.

The king did ill,
 Relaxing from his wrath.

DE BROC.

When next he storms,
 Give not repentance time. This too remember :
 In all your gilt king-clan, there’s but one head ;
 That head is John of Oxford’s : but one hand ;
 That hand the hand you scoffed. You sail to-night ?

FITZ-URSE.

Aye ! John of Oxford waits this consecration.

(A sailor looks in at the window, and makes a sign.)

Summoned ! Your wind is fair : I know your captain ;
 A stalwart man, not scrupulous. Last night

Our wine was gift of his. When next the king
Shall send you hither, see you bring your sword:
This time you came to babble.

SCENE VIII.—THE WESTERN ENTRANCE TO THE
CATHEDRAL OF CANTERBURY.

A multitude of clerics and others stand around watching the advance of BECKET, preceded by a procession of nobles, abbots, and bishops. JOHN OF SALISBURY and HERBERT OF BOSHAM converse alone.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Since came to him this greatness he is sad ;
He fears the election was not wholly free.

HERBERT.

When Canterbury's towers looked on us first
O'er the great woodlands, thus he spake : ' Last night
By me there stood a Venerable Form,
And gave me talents ten ; ' then added low,
' See that thou sift my faults with flail and fan :
I count thee traitor else.'

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

They pass the gate :

Thomas walks last, and by his side the prince,
Holding his hand full fast. That child well loves him :
A word 'gainst Becket, and his face, heaven-bright,
Clouds with his father's frown !

HERBERT.

When first I saw him,
It was his birthday. Loud the trumpets blared,
And fair the banners waved. The child was glad,
And tossed his head in triumph. Becket warned him :
'Child, walk less proudly ! He who fashioned man,
Fashioned yon worm ; and when the man lies dead
The worm consumes his flesh !' 'My flesh ?' in wrath
The prince cried out ; 'my flesh—the King of Eng-
land's ?—

I 'd treat them thus !'—and on the green turf thrice
Down stamped his little crimson boot ;—They come !

*(The procession enters the Cathedral, the people kneeling
at each side.)*

BECKET.

Ye that have power with God, the poor of Christ,
Lift up your hearts, and pray that England's primate
May walk in honesty with God till death !

*(The procession advances to the high altar, before which sits
HENRY OF BLOIS, Bishop of Winton. The monks of
St. Augustine's Monastery stand in a semicircle around*

him. *The bishops take their seats in two rows below him, in front of the altar; the abbots sit, and the nobles stand behind them.)*

LEICESTER (*apart to de Luci*).

My lord of Winton consecrates the primate ;
The king will like not that.

DE LUCI.

It shall bestead him.

My Lord of York made claim, and Hereford,
And some Welsh bishop, oldest in the land,
Who butts against Pelagius in his dreams,
And thinks him living yet. I spake with Winton :
Becket he loves—except when others praise him ;—
And this day will in grave discourse exhort
To walk in modesty of virtue, taming
Man's pride of flesh, and please our lord the king.

THE BISHOP OF ROCHESTER (*addressing the Bishop of Winton*).

Most reverend lord, through me the Church presents,
For consecration to a bishop's order,
The archiepiscopal degree, and throne
Primatial of the total realm of England,
Thomas, a presbyter of life approved.

HENRY OF WINTON.

Was this election free?

THE PRIOR OF ST. AUGUSTINE'S.

My lord, 't was free.

HENRY OF WINTON.

It resteth with the bishops of the province
To ratify the election, or annul.
What sentence make my lords?

GILBERT.

My lord, our voices
Unanimous approve—the loudest mine.

HENRY OF WINTON.

My lords, this work, we trust, is work of God ;
Not less, where things of heaven with earthly mix,
A creeping wariness perforce hath place
'Mid duties more sublime. This hour mine eye
Rests on a youth who to the heart of England,
That most in innocence seeth God,
Presenteth ever comfort of her hope,
And to this Church good auspice. Here he stands
To answer for his father. Royal sir,
This man, elect to Canterbury's chair,
Hath long time lived the realm's high chancellor ;

Dispensed her offices ; held in his hand
Her treasury's golden key. A man so trusted
Hath enemies. For that cause we demand
That Thomas to the Church be given absolved
From every claim foregone, just or unjust,
Derived from functions past ; henceforth for aye
A free man, with a spirit's freedom ranging
Among the things of God.

PRINCE HENRY.

My Lord of Winton,
And you, my lords, England's great prelacy,
In apostolic synod this day met,
Though young, I stand commissioned by my sire,
And, acting in his name, and by his will,
Concede that just demand.

HENRY OF WINTON.

Son, read the oath.

(BECKET reads the oath of a bishop aloud, and ends—)

May God so help me, and His holy Gospels !

HENRY OF WINTON.

Son, it behoves a bishop of Christ's Church
To make confession of her faith and morals :
Believest thou one God in Persons Three,

The Incarnation of the Second Person,
And, through His death, redemption?

BECKET.

I believe.

HENRY OF WINTON.

Wilt thou bear witness to the sacred Scriptures
And sage traditions of past times?

BECKET.

I will.

HENRY OF WINTON.

Wilt thou to Peter, and that kingly line
Long-linked with his, which wields the keys of heaven,
Be liegeful and of constant heart?

BECKET.

I will.

HENRY OF WINTON.

Wilt thou in chastity and lowness live,
With spirit averse to worldly greed?

BECKET.

I will.

HENRY OF WINTON.

Wilt thou be gracious to the poor of Christ?

BECKET.

I will.

HENRY OF WINTON.

God give thee increase of thy faith,
And good resolve, to blessedness eternal !

(*The assistant bishops conduct BECKET to a side chapel. After a short time they lead him back, wearing sandals, the pectoral cross, the stole, tunicle, dalmatic, and maniple. Passing the altar of St. Benedict, he kneels and prays. The Litanies are then sung, the bishops and other assistants kneeling, while BECKET lies on his face before the high altar. The Litanies ended, he kneels while the assistant bishops, solemnly opening the Book of the Gospels, rest it upon his neck and shoulders. After this they lay their hands on his head, saying, 'Accipe Spiritum Sanctum,' while the Veni Creator Spiritus is sung. The BISHOP OF WINTON then, first slowly making the sign of the cross over BECKET's head, anoints it with the holy chrism, while two choirs, one at the high altar, and one in the chapel of St. Benedict, sing alternately the verses of the Antiphon, Sicut unguentum in capite.)*

HENRY OF WINTON.

Eternal King, and Kingly Priest on high,
Whose virtue makes the worlds for ever young,
Upon the head of this Thy priest on earth
Send forth Thy grace. In stillness let it creep
Down to the utmost parts invisible
Of spirit and of soul. In him sustain
True faith, true love. Make beautiful his feet,

And wingèd on the mountain-tops, forth speeding
Thy herald with Thy Gospel for mankind :
Be his to preach it, not by craft of men,
But demonstration of Thy Spirit divine,
In word and work. Grant him in right and might
To wield Thy keys ; and what he binds on earth
Bind Thou in heaven. Thy blessing send on them
That bless him, and Thy ban on them that curse :
Let him not put the evil for the good,
Darkness for light. Fear he the face of none.
Be Thou his strength, that mightily he rule
Thy Church in this Thy realm, and save Thy people.

(*The BISHOP OF WINTON then blesses the pastoral staff and the ring, and delivers them to BECKET, as well as the Book of the Gospels, closed, and finally gives him the kiss of peace, which last the assistant bishops likewise reverently bestow.*)

RICHARD DE LUCI (*apart to Leicester*).

My lord will preach. Draw near !

LEICESTER.

Some eight years since
Our coronation feast at Westminster
Showed us a pomp more rich. That day the prelates
In divers-coloured silks so shone that still,
Move where they might past gloomiest arch or aisle,
They wove a varying rainbow, such as braids
The dark skirts of a cloud.

DE LUCI.

And cloud and storm
 That lovely light portended. 'T was the queen
 Who changed our graver splendours of the West
 That day to plumage of the Eastern Church,
 Inwov'n with flower and gem. The Grecian rites,
 In that schismatic seat of Constantine,
 Had charmed her wild and wandering eye.

LEICESTER.

Lo there !

HENRY OF WINTON (*placing the mitre on Becket's head*).
 The helmet of salvation gird the head
 Of God's high warrior : from its horns forth shine
 The glories twinned of either Testament :
 Auspicious beam they as from Moses' face
 That light of God. Be they His people's strength,
 And terrible to those who hate the truth.

HERBERT (*to John of Salisbury, still near the western entrance*).

I catch no word.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

The man who takes his stand
 Hard by a torrent hears no sound beside :
 Beyond that gate a torrent people streams——

HERBERT.

Streams like the world, and all its blind confusions ;
Within, behold the vision of God's peace !
Between these twain we stand.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

The rite 's complete :
The primate kneels for blessing.

HERBERT.

Ha ! What means it ?
The Consecrator blesses from his chair ;
And none is loyal more to forms than Winton.
Why stands he thus with hands to heaven upheld ;
His white head shining like a sun new-risen,
Through wintry mist dim seen ?

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

At last he speaks !

HENRY OF WINTON.

This day the Spirit Prophetic on me falls,
Nor rests with me to speak or to forbear.
My will it was to preach of peace, and lo !
I see in heaven a sword ;—
Son, take God's blessing in a choice of woes :

Betwixt an earthly and a heavenly king,
Elect of God, this day election make !

HERBERT.

See, see ! The primate clasps his hands, and lifts
them—
Heavenward he looks !

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

He speaks.

BECKET.

My choice is made.

(There is a pause. The assistant bishops then lead BECKET to the archiepiscopal throne, the two choirs singing the Te Deum in alternate verses.)

ACT II.

SCENE I.—THE CASTLE OF NORTHAMPTON.

KING HENRY, QUEEN ELEANOR, RICHARD DE LUCI,
CORNWALL, FITZ-URSE, THE BISHOP OF LISIEUX,
LEICESTER.

KING HENRY.

I never loved a man as I loved that man ;
Nor any loved me better. Many a time,
In years gone by, I marked him on me bend
An eye that, up and down, the measure took
Of my hid soul, yet ended with a smile,
As though, beyond the ill, it kenned some good
I knew not of myself.
The greater crime that, knowing me, he mocks me !
A thousand times that man hath heard me swear
That alien none, or priest, shall share my kingdom.
I 'll wear it like the armour on my back ;
I 'll wield it as a man his members wields ;
I 'll walk, its living soul !

DE LUCI.

Thomas is honest.

KING HENRY.

He has me there : the crafty and the keen
I soon outrun.

DE LUCI.

And not, I think, ambitious.

KING HENRY.

Ambitious was he till the height was gained :
No step remaining for his climbing foot,
He kneels him down a saint !

FITZ-URSE.

A saint is Becket
That makes his feast with sinners. What a race !
There 's one at Exeter that, charged with crime,
Dropped poison in the accuser's cup.

CORNWALL.

And Gilbert,
Who scorns to hide the failings of his cloth,
Reports some priest at Winchester well known,
Who, leagued with robbers, left his church-door wide :—
They stole the chalice.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

These be Becket's clients,
Secure from civil courts ! Who loves the sin
Will screen the sinner.

KING HENRY.

Aye, good queen ; you hate him !
Your tongue is sharp against him many a year ;
Sharpest, men whisper, since that May long past,
When, young in face and chancellor not bishop,
He with the pageant of his greatness filled
The broad eye of the world ; and certain ladies
Whose gamesome graces beautified your court
Made vow to put his gravity to proof,
And found that they had stained their fame, not his,
Their glamour and their glitter still to him
But gleam of swarming insects ! Once your spy
Found him on bare boards sleeping.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

John of Oxford

Reports your favourite's gratitude. At feast
He descants on your Highness thus—' This puppet,
Who, sans my aid at Rome in Stephen's time,
Had lacked his realm, and twice since then had
lost it,

This feather dancing on a nation's crown,
This bubble winking on the Church's cup,
Presumes himself my king !'. How answers Henry ?
Why thus—‘The violet of humility
Not oft 'mid regal virtues finds a place :
In the heath garland of Plantagenet
Be mine to wear it first !’

JOHN OF OXFORD (*entering with a profound obeisance*).

May it please your Highness,
A noisy challenge soon will beat your gates.
Southward ten miles from this the primate halts ;
There learned he that the royal grooms had filled
That mansion pre-ordained to his greatness,
By providence of his friends ;—incensed, at morn
To Canterbury he posts.

KING HENRY.

Pernicious upstart !
Whom, groping in the dirt, this hand upraised,
And lodged on high to be my shame and plague ;
Vile hypocrite wearing religion's mask,
And signing with his cross rebellion's way ;
To Canterbury let him ! He shall wake,
His pride's debauch exhaled, in heavier bonds
Than Odo wore, the Conqueror's prelate brother—
Speak out thy thought, good John !

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Please it, your Highness,
 If I might counsel, give the fool his way.
 Throughout all England, save alone this city,
 Mailed by your peers and splendid with your court,
 That man's a king—a pope at Canterbury :
 Once here, he's in your power.

KING HENRY.

There's much in that.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Yield him his house—a street, if he demands it :
 A thunder-shower ere long shall drench his plumes :
 Methinks I see his knights and chaplains flying—

QUEEN ELEANOR.

Let them not fly to me ! No skirt of mine
 Shall fence the pygmies !

JOHN OF OXFORD.

For the Royal Customs,
 Name not their name at first : that blow comes last :
 I glance at this to guard you from his wiles.
 He swears that with a triple fraud his feet
 Were snared that day when, sore against his will,
 He promised to abide them. First—

KING HENRY.

Be brief !

LISIEUX.

Sire, if it please you, John is well advised.
However sage may be those Royal Customs,
And wholesome for this realm, whose stubborn heart
Requires the heavy hand, his Grace is strong
In precedents against them through all lands,
And armed with these, shall draw to him the bishops
Who love him least. Those Customs, seldom here
Except through dread admitted, are the band
Which in one fagot binds the several sticks
That, dealt with one by one, were quickly snapt.
Withdraw their central stay !

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Tax first the primate
With unparticipated crimes ; his only ;
His special forfeit, his unshared offence ;
Then shall his bishops leave him. One thing more :
See that he 'scape not ! nail him to this isle !
If once he stand on Christendom's broad ground
With feet secure, the might of Christendom
Will rise into his arm. Who wields that might
Hurls the three-bolted thunder from the clouds
And rules the orb of earth.

DE TRACY (*entering*).

My liege, two priests,
Sent by my lord the primate.

KING HENRY.

Bid them enter.

(*HERBERT OF BOSHAM and LLEWELLEN enter.*)

Sirs, ere ye speak, the boon ye claim is yours :
A humbler company hath filled, I hear,
The primate's house. Return, and let him know
Their boldness is rebuked.

[*He turns away. Herbert and Llewellen bow low and depart.*

How say ye, lords ?

Whose men are ye ? King Henry's or King Becket's ?
Speak freely—ye have leave.

LEICESTER.

Sire, while this arm
Cleaves to this body, cleave I to my king.

NOBLES AND COURTIERS.

King Henry and his right ! King's men are we !

KING HENRY.

My lords, there hath been question here and there
Of benefices, and the right to fill them ;
The Church is over-fleshed with lands and tithes,

And staggers 'neath their weight. To stay that evil,
We will that presentations from this hour
Be deemed his appanage who holds the fief.

NOBLES AND COURTIERS.

Our swords shall guard it ! Henry and our right !

KING HENRY.

My Lord Justiciary alone is silent.

DE LUCI.

My liege, the Royal Customs were our theme :
I deem the royal claim doubtful in part ;
More doubtful yet this claim to presentations.
The law must solve that knot. The law declared,
Nor swayed by spiritual threat or civil,
I will enforce that law.

KING HENRY.

My lords, farewell !

[All depart, except John of Oxford.

Come hither, John ! I know it now : alone
He rules his realm whose hand, unquestioned, turns
That inmost central wheel which turns all others.
Lisieux himself this day was mine but half—
Henceforth all bishops must be my creation.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

A nomination from the royal lips
Meets but a coy resistance.

KING HENRY.

There you err ;
The power that 's indirect is incomplete.
Those monks who ratified my choice of Becket,
Had you been named, not he, had spurned my choice.
We want new laws. The king must make his prelates;
The chapters—say their delegates rather—met
Not in their minsters but his royal chapel,
Must ratify his choice.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

That time will come ;
But they the act who fear not, fear the shame,
And will not sin i' the sun. Leave all to me.
Break, where you can, the courage of those bishops ;
Divide them, each from each ; keep empty long
The vacant sees. One hour some crisis dire
Shall wring from those proud lords of York and London
Consent to that which, urged this day, might shake
Its gloss from Lisieux's silk. When comes that hour
Your Highness shall not miss it.

KING HENRY.

Look to that !

SCENE II.—NORTHAMPTON ; BECKET'S HOUSE.

BECKET sitting on a low bed in his pontificals. A large number of bishops enter.

FIRST BISHOP.

Most reverend father, primate of all England,
We grieve to learn your Grace is ill——

BECKET.

That's past :

Brother, time presses : 't is to-day the feast
Of good King Edward's relics late translated ;
I pray you to be brief.

SECOND BISHOP.

My lord, we bishops
Are fed on common food, breathe common air ;
Rumours we hear which reach not that high clime
Your Grace serenely breathes. Beware, my lord,
For as a cliff eternal sits this king ;
In vain the billows beat its base.

BECKET.

The Church
Was once the rock ; nations the waves. Who next ?

THIRD BISHOP.

My lord, our duty is to speak the truth.

Destruction stands against us, face to face :
The king has sworn to vindicate—nay more,
To change henceforth to laws, his Royal Customs.

BECKET.

'T is so.

FOURTH BISHOP.

His barons and his knights are with him :
He, like the Conqueror, lifts an iron hand ;
They, like an iron breast-plate on his breast,
Have vowed them to the vengeance of his will.

BECKET.

'T is so.

FIFTH BISHOP.

My lord, the wrestler needs firm ground ;
The giant set on quicksands, or on ice,
Becomes the pigmy's laughter. Peter's rock
Was once the strength of each true churchman's battle :
What find we now ? A Pope, and anti-pope ;
The Emperor with the last ; and with the first
England and France. No Pope will war on England.
A sager Henry fights old Beauclerk's wars ;—
Beware lest you should rouse a bloodier Rufus.

BECKET.

My lords, have you said all ? Then, hear me speak.

I might be large to tell you, courtier prelates,
That if the Conqueror's was an iron hand,
Not less 't was just. Oftenest it used aright
Its power usurped. It decked no idiot brow
With casual mitre ; neither lodged in grasp
That, ague-shaken, scarce could hold its bribe,
The sceptres of the shepherds of Christ's flock.
I might remind you that, if Rufus lived
A bestial life, he died the death of beasts ;
That Henry Beauclerk in old Anselm met
A keener head than his, and heavier hand,
Albeit a gentler ; that his ten years' war
Ended in this—Investitures disowned,
Church discipline restored, Christ's poor protected.
O happy sage ! in battles of this world
The cloistral shades of Bec were with him still,
Its holy anthems ever in his ears ;
And when the craven prelates round his throne,
For counsel summoned, counsel dared not give,
Silent they hung their heads ; they babbled not
Plain treason, or veiled threat.

GILBERT.

My lord, your pardon !
We dare not leave the sacred charge of souls
To strive in worldly conflicts.

BECKET.

Gilbert ! Gilbert !

They that rejoice in heaven o'er sinners saved
Wept for thy fall. Is that the hand which wrote,
‘Apostate is the man who turns his back
Upon St. Peter's chair?’ My voice it was
Raised thee from Hereford's to London's see ;
I hoped thee brave and true. Vantage thou had'st,
Chastening from youth thy spirit and thy flesh,
At Cluny first, and afterwards at Gloucester ;—
Then Satan made alliance with the world,
And wrecked thee through thy fame—
Gilbert, some swineherd or some scullion grasps
This day thy destined crown !

Bishops of England !

For many truths by you this day enforced,
Hear ye in turn but one. The Church is God's :
Lords, were it ours, then might we traffic with it ;
At will make large its functions, or contract ;
Serve it or sell ; worship or crucify.
I say the Church is God's ; for He beheld it,
His thought, ere time began ; counted its bones,
Which in His book were writ. I say that He
From His own side in water and in blood
Gave birth to it on Calvary, and caught it,
Despite the nails, His Bride, in His own arms :

I say that He, a Spirit of clear heat,
Lives in its frame, and cleanses with pure pain
His sacrificial precinct, but consumes
The chaff with other ardours. Lords, I know you ;
What done ye have, and what intend ere yet
Yon sun that rises weeping sets this night ;
And therefore bind I with this charge your souls :
If any secular court shall pass its verdict
On me, your lord, or ere that sin be sinned,
I bid you flee that court ; if secular arm
Attempt me, lay thereon the Church's ban,
Or else against you I appeal to Rome.
To-day the heathen rage—I fear them not :
If fall I must, this hand, ere yet I fall,
Stretched from the bosom of a peaceful gown
Above a troubled king and darkening realm,
Shall send God's sentence forth. My lords, farewell !

[*The bishops bow low and depart.*

SCENE III.—A STREET IN NORTHAMPTON.

JOHN OF OXFORD, FITZ-URSE.

FITZ-URSE.

They baited him two days : he 's out of breath,
Not out of heart.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

His mitred brethren first
Quaked for themselves. 'T was brave to watch them
 later,
When charge on charge was hurled on him alone,
And no word uttered which impugned their order;
To mark them whispering first ; then glancing round,
Like woodland creatures peering from their holes
When storms are gone. Ere long they basked and
 swelled
Like birds on late-drenched branches, sunshine-gilt,
And cleared their throats for song.

FITZ-URSE.

The king observed them :
He said, 'They nought had grudged it had my voice
Vouchsafed them John of Oxford for their primate ;
Aye, or yourself, Fitz-Urse !'

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Their playtime 's past :
The storm gone by rolls back. At noon this day
We reach the Royal Customs.

SCENE IV.—THE GREAT HALL OF NORTHAMPTON
CASTLE.

The nobles are ranged along both sides. At the upper end is the royal throne, beyond which are the king's apartments. At the lower end are seated the bishops and abbots. BECKET approaches, attended, and wearing the sacred vestments, under the black habit of a canon regular. Entering, he takes the cross from his cross-bearer, and seats himself at the lower end of the hall, HERBERT and FITZ-STEPHEN sitting at his feet.

A COURTIER (*to Gilbert of London*).

Ld, where your primate enters, cross in hand,
As though to chase a host of fiends malignant !

GILBERT.

The man was born a fool, and fool will die :
At dawn this day he said St. Stephen's mass,
'Sederunt principes,' invoking next
St. Edward, king and saint.

HENRY OF WINTON (*to Roger of York*).

The primate's face
Hath in it light, yet storm. The crisis comes :
This day he 'll shake the world.

ROGER.

The man, late sick,
Hath left his sick bed, whole.

(*The KING enters, and takes his seat on the throne.*)

KING HENRY.

What means yon cross?
Am I a Pagan, that the Holy Sign
Must guard a vassal of my throne against me?

BECKET.

It guards the faith of Christ ; and well He knows,
Whose eyes adorable through all things pierce,
The cross of Christ was never needfuller
Than in this hall, and now.

[*The King leaves his throne suddenly, and returns to his apartments, followed by most of the bishops.*

A COURTIER.

What 's this? My lords, I say that in your midst
There sits a traitor proven !

A BARON.

A manifest traitor!

(*Shouts of 'Treason!' fill the hall ; the tramp of armed men is heard in the court and the passages adjoining the hall, and men in armour are seen at the doors.*)

HERBERT (*in a low voice to Becket*).

Father, have ready in your hand the Sentence :
The storm will break upon you.

A ROYAL MARSHAL.

Silence, sir !

(Fitz-STEPHEN turns his eyes on BECKET, and then raises them to the crucifix at the end of the hall, on which BECKET at once fixes his own.)

A BARON (*entering, addressing Becket*).

My lord, the king demands if you acknowledge
That sentence of the court on Friday last,
Which charged upon your head those moneys lodged,
While you were chancellor, in the Chancery,
And claimed them at your hands ?

BECKET.

You have reached your goal,
Sir, by well-met stages. Thursday last,
Mine enemies, seeking pretence to slay me,
Placed at one side the question of the Customs,
And urged but personal pleas. First, John the
Marshal—
He, not long since, had sued me for a farm,
In mine own court ; and, to the king's appealing,
Plucked from his vest a book of ribald songs,

On that, and not the Gospels, making oath.
Sirs, was this law, or mockery of all law?
Not less your parliament, as you know, amerced
me ;
And I submitted. Next they brought in charge
The one time rents of Berkhamstead and Eye :
I spent them on those castles' just repairs,
As all men knew ;—not less the parliament
Fined me three hundred pounds ; and I submitted,
My Lord of Gloucester for that sum my bail.
The king demanded next a thousand marks,
A loan long past : he knows I spent that gold,
And thrice as much, mine own, upon his wars.
Then came his last demand—revenues stored
In Chancery long since, and rents of abbeys,
Full thirty thousand marks. That claim set forth,
My Lord of Winton raised those aged hands
Which poured on me the unction, and appealed ;
' Ho ! ye that saw and heard, witness this day !
His see was given to him absolved, and free
From all pretence of obligations past,
By lips of the king's son ! ' My lords, that hour
My knights fell from me, and my clerics fled ;
And of my bishops one now near me cried,
' Would thou wert Thomas only, not archbishop ! '
But with me God remained.

A BARON.

My lord, your answer

BECKET.

Sir, to your question answer thus I make :
I pay no more false debts. Lords, to my king
I stand by nature bound—bound by my homage,
Bound by my oath, and bound not less by love.
I know his virtues, and his princely heart ;
Remember well his benefits of old :
My king I honour—honouring more my God.
My lords, they lie who brand mine honest fame
With fealty halved. With doubly-linked allegiance
He serves his king who serves him for God's sake ;
But who serves thus must serve his God o'er all.
I served him thus, and serve.

CORNWALL.

You serve the king !
Who stirred these wars ? Who spurned the Royal
Customs ?

BECKET.

The Customs, aye, the Customs ! We have reached
At last—'t was time—the inmost of this plot,
Till now so deftly veiled and ambushed ;—‘Customs !’
O specious word, how plausibly abused !

In Catholic ears that word is venerable,
To Catholic souls custom is law itself ;
Law that its own foot hears not, dumbly treading
A velvet path, smoothed by traditions old.
I war not, sirs, with ways traditionary ;
The Church of Christ herself is a tradition ;—
Aye, but 't is God's tradition, not of men !
Sir, these your Customs are God's Laws reversed,
Traditions making void the Word of God,
Old innovations from the first withheld,
The rights of Holy Church, the poor man's portion,
Sold, and for nought, to aliens. Customs ! Customs !
Custom was that which to the lord o' the soil
Yielded the virgin one day wedded ! Customs !
A century they have lived ; but he ne'er lived,
The man that knew their number or their scope,
Where found, by whom begotten, or how named :
Like malefactors, long they hid in holes ;
They walked in mystery like the noontide pest ;
In the air they danced; they lived on breath of princes,
Largest when princes' lives were most unclean,
And visible most when rankest was the mist.
Sirs, I defy your Customs ; they are nought ;—
From them I turn to our old English laws,
The Confessor's, and theirs who went before him,
The charters old, and sacred oaths of kings :

I clasp the Tables twain of Sinai ;
On them I lay my palms, my breast, my forehead,
And on the altars dyed by martyrs' blood,
Making to God appeal.

LEICESTER (*to Cornwall*).

My lord, return we ;

This matter takes a range beyond our powers :
Behoves us bear the king his Grace's answer.

[*They depart.*

BECKET.

Why sits he not among us ? Lo, his throne !
This cross should be its stay. I know the king :
Saints of his stock this hour in heaven befriend him !
But with man's spirit, alas, a tempter strives,
That never loved Christ's cross !

A BARON.

Stigand, proud priest,

Was such as you ; like his will be your doom !

(*The bishops return from the king's apartments with signs of terror.*)

ROGER OF YORK.

Hence! lest we see the proud man's doom. Attendance!

GILBERT (*to Becket*).

My lord, your pardon ! You have placed your
bishops

This day between the hammer and the anvil ;
At Clarendon the Customs you received,
This day you spurn them.

BECKET.

You have heard, my lords,
That partial truth which more envenoms falsehood.
May shame deserved be my sin's expiation !
At Clarendon I sinned—thus much all know ;
Few know the limit of that sin, and fewer
The threefold fraud that meshed me in that sin,
From which, like weeping Peter, I arose,
To fall, I trust, no more. My lords, that day
There came to me two Templars from the king,
Who swore his Highness inwardly was racked
That, snared by flatterers, he had made demands
Which, for his honour's sake, he could not cancel,
Yet which, if yielded but in phrase by us,
Should vex the Church no further. I refused.
Came next the papal envoy from Aumone,
With word the Pope, moved by the troublous time,
Willed my submission to the royal will.
This was the second fraud ;—remains the third.
My lords, the Customs named till then were few ;
In evil hour I yielded—pledged the Church,
Alas ! to what I knew not. On the instant

The king commanded, ‘ Write ye down these Laws :’
And soon, too soon, a parchment pre-ordained
Upon our table lay—a scroll inscribed
With usages sixteen, whereof most part
Were shamefuller than the worst discussed till then.
My lords, too late I read that scroll. I spurned it ;
I sware by Him who made the heavens and earth
That never seal of mine should touch that bond,
Not mine, but juggle-changed. My lords, that eve
A truthful servant, and a fearless one,
Who bears my cross—and taught me too to bear one—
Probed me and proved with sharp and searching words,
And as the sun my sin before me stood.
My lords, for forty days I kept my fast,
And held me from the offering of the mass,
And sat in sackcloth ; till the Pope sent word,
‘ Arise ; be strong, and walk.’ And I arose,
And hither came ; and here confession make
That till the cleansed leper once again
Takes, voluntary, back his leprosy,
I with those Royal Customs stain no more
My soul which Christ hath washed.

(*The barons return from the king, and advance to BECKET, who retains his seat ; at their head CORNWALL and LEICESTER.*)

CORNWALL.

My lord, the king commands that on the instant

You render up accounts of moneys lodged,
Whilst you were chancellor, in the Chancery ;
If not, attend your sentence !

BECKET.

Son and earl,
Hear first your father, and the king's. How well
I loved that king, how faithfully I served him,
Is known to you and all. You said, I think,
The king had sent you hither with a sentence ;—
Son, by a mandate from the King of Kings,
By virtue of mine office, and that power
It gives me through the laws of Christendom,
I bar you from the uttering of that sentence,
And seal your lips with silence.

CORNWALL.

Speak it thou,
My Lord of Leicester.

LEICESTER.

Nay, my lord, not I.
I dare not touch a priest. The hand, moreover,
Which clasps yon cross, in battle saved my life.

CORNWALL (*about to return to the king*).

Your Grace will here abide——

BECKET.

Am I a bondsman ?

CORNWALL.

St. Lazarus ! no, my lord.

BECKET.

My son, attend !

By how much man's imperishable soul
Exceeds in worth his body, by so much
Beseems you to obey the King of Heaven
Above all earthly lords. Nor law, nor reason,
Nor human precedent, nor faith divine,
Endures that children should condemn their sire.
Wherefore this judgment of a king that errs
I from me cast, and, under God, appeal
To Peter's chair, and him who sits thereon ;
Placing beneath his shield my life, mine honour,
And Canterbury's church. My fellow-bishops,
This day the vassals not of God but man,
You too I summon to that high award ;
And thus, protected by the Holy See,
I hence depart.

(BECKET rises, and, still bearing his cross, moves toward the gates.)

DE BROE (from the gates).

He flies ! cut down the traitor !

BECKET (*looking back*).

Caitiff and coward ! How well thou know'st this hand
Is knightly now no more.

[*He departs ; the barons and courtiers standing still,
and none daring to arrest him.*

SCENE V.—CASTLE OF NORTHAMPTON.

THE KING, JOHN OF OXFORD.

KING HENRY.

The lion's loose ! I see it in your eye !

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Sire, he is fled. Last evening was his triumph :
The people, as he issued hence (their crime,
The fools that should have held him fast) knelt down,
Craving his blessing. In St. Andrew's convent
He chaunted nones, and vespers first ; then dined,
Ranging the poor, the halt, the lame, the dumb,
Around his board, in place of friends who fled.
When night descended, sanctuary he took
In the great church :—they strewed his rushy bed
Behind the altar, and with stinted rite
Sang compline low in reverence of his sleep

After his fight with beasts at Ephesus.
Ere break of day he 'scaped, and none know whither,
Helped by the headlong rain, and stormy dark.
Reach he but France, from every turf he treads
A knight full-armed shall leap, and rage against you.

KING HENRY.

Guard all the ports ! each castle, fort, and village :
Who favours his escape shall die the death !
That cross which yesterday preserved the traitor
Has done him its last service. Captured once,
He lives thenceforth in chains !

ACT III.

SCENE I.—THE COAST NOT FAR FROM GRAVELINES.

BECKET, HERBERT OF BOSHAM, A BOY.

BECKET.

Once more a world before me, and a foot
Strenuous to tread it! Twelve hours past, each moment
My fancy gasped in dungeon vaults eterne.
Thanks be to God, and help of praying Saints,
A free man's step is mine. Fair land of France!
How bright a sunshine lives upon thy brow!
How laugh in light those upland plains! How sweet
That song of youth and maid! My mother England,
Be thou not wróth against thine exiled son,
Against his will exultant; God Who proves us
Wills us not less our triumph's little hour.
That time, that time shall come, my mother England,
When, with a mightier joy, thy son returned,
Shall hail thy hoary cliffs, the invader's dread;
Thy fields, and farms, and forests, convent-crowned;

Thy minsters gathering, as the parent bird
Gathers her young, the growing cities round them ;—
Thine honest, valiant, and industrious race,
So christian-like in manners and in mind,
So grave in deeds, and yet so merry-hearted,
And in their plainness kind,—once more shall greet
them
With mightier joy, though hastening to his death,
Than now he greets his freedom.

HERBERT.

Father, whither ?
For here the roads divide—to Paris this.

BECKET.

My steps are to St. Peter's successor !
Forward to Sens ! (*To his guide.*)
My pretty sun-burnt guide,
Farewell to thy bright eyes, and way-side songs !
Thanks for good service done ; and thanks the more
For service without fee !

BOY.

My reverend father,
For love, not gold, I served thee. Therefore thou
Love me in turn, and give me one gold piece
From love's good will, or little silver brooch,

To prick in me memory of those great words.
Thou spak'st of Heaven !

BECKET.

Ha ! subtle-witted knave,
Was that thy meaning ? Kneel, and wear this cross ;—
My blessing with it. Up and fare thee well !

SCENE II.—CASTLE OF COMPIÈGNE.

LOUIS, *King of France*, JOHN OF SALISBURY, LLEWELLEN.

KING LOUIS.

No need of pleading, sirs : I know the man :
I met him first breasting the tides of war,
And more admired, than joyed to see, his banner,
That still made way when others tacked and veered
On that large-labouring sea. In peace I found him
A loyal man, and honest, lofty-souled,
And resolute in his purpose. Never father
So loved, methought, a son, as he his king,
Who brave, but erring, plays this day a part
Not knightly, and not Christian. Sirs, he 's hot,
And notes, methinks, but half of that great word,
'Be wroth, yet sin not.' Send me here your primate !

LLEWELLEN.

'T is like a king !

KING LOUIS.

My friend, France glories still
To welcome noble foes.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

May it please your Highness,
The primate stands resolved to light no flame
Betwixt two kings now happily at one :
Not therefore lacks he grateful heart to France,
That great old land which shall not cease from greatness
While faithful to its God. He hastes to Sens.

KING LOUIS.

I love the man, or distant, or close by,
Knowing him injured, and esteeming just.
Tell him no girl-lip in my France hath ever
Trembled more sweetly ere it owned the' truth,
Than this old heart for joy when came the news
He trod our shores secure.

SCENE III.—THE PALACE AT SENS.

POPE ALEXANDER III. *in consistory with the Cardinals.*
BECKET, HERBERT OF BOSHAM, and other English
priests. THE ABBOT OF PONTIGNY.

BECKET.

Most holy father, vicar of our Lord,
And ye the princely senate of the Church,
Too long, and naming far too oft myself,
Your patience I have taxed. Yet this I deemed,
That, kings impugning, it beseemed me likewise
To blame my proper sin at Clarendon,
And justice do to him who did me wrong.
His ‘Royal Customs,’ new compared with her,
Whose years are from of old, have precedents
Which show but late their teeth. Abuse was borne
When tyrants played the kitten, not the tiger.
To make exception law, concede of right
Whate’er past time, enforced or heedless, suffered,
This were with fraudulent gloss history to wrest
As heretics wrest Scripture.

THE POPE.

Justly reasoned—
Him that like Charlemagne upraised the Church

The Church might trust : Antiochus, or Herod,
Shall have his right ;—not more !

BECKET.

I grant this also;
O'er-ripe corruption breeds foretold disease :
Church wealth abounds; it brought the hireling first,
It brings the spoiler now.

CARDINAL WILLIAM.

My lord archbishop,
Though young in the episcopate, is wise ;—
'Where lies the carcase, there the eagles flock :'
Noting that truth, his Grace would share our wealth
With nobles and with kings.

BECKET.

My lord, not so !
In troubled days like these, if bandit barons,
Fierce from the cup, rode forth o'er waste and wild
All unchallenged by the Church's barons,
Like them large-landed, and with knights in train,
The landless priest should keep not his own skin.
We must hold all or nought.

CARDINAL WILLIAM.

I understand not :
My lord the archbishop, late, at Clarendon
Connived, he said——

THE POPE.

Brother, forbear that theme !
The primate made the Christian expiation,
In sackcloth and in ashes, forty days.

HERBERT.

My lord went later to a second council :
Of that he hath not spoken ;—bid him speak.

THE POPE.

What council ?

BECKET.

At Northampton it was held :
There, fooled no longer, I denounced those Customs
Whereof last eve I laid the list new-writ
For judgment at your footstool.

THE POPE.

I have read them.
Six might be borne, though bad : the rest are impious ;
Servile to kings, seditious 'gainst the Church,
False to her lord. The sacraments themselves,
The sacred keys, the discipline divine,
They subject to the will of temporal powers ;
They crush the free election of the bishops ;
They bar appeal to this most Holy See,
My glory, which I yield not to another,

The safety of the meanest of Christ's flock.
That great appeal removed, by secular hands
The arteries of the Church were knotted up,
And into fragments torn that sacred body
Whose life is in the whole. For this cause, God
Diffused among all realms one single Church,
That unity might be its life's true pledge,
Too vast by any to be slain, or chained.
That Church enslaved, what next? The Faith must
vanish!
For on the Church's witness rests the truth,
And if that Church be stifled in the embrace
Of any fleshly realm—engulfed—absorbed—
Who shall receive her words?

CARDINAL WILLIAM.

Yea verily,
From the whale's belly when the prophet speaks,
Who hears is quick of ear.

BECKET.

This sin of kings
Is gendered of their pride.

THE POPE.

The realm of such
Ere long shall be partaker with the worm;

The blind-worm is its sister, and corruption
Its mother, and the dust its winding-sheet ;
For power, earth-born, shall back once more to earth.
O witless kingdoms ! scorn ye then that kingdom,
Forth from whose womb ye issued—still your stay,
The sole not born from mortal lust or pride ;
The kingdom of one God in Persons Three ;
The kingdom of a universe redeemed ;
The kingdom of humanity assumed ;
The kingdom of the creed and of the prayer ;
The kingdom of commandments just and wise ;
The kingdom of the three great virtues winged
Which gaze on heaven ; the eight beatitudes ;
The sacraments, those seven great gates of God
Betwixt the worlds of spirit and flesh ; the kingdom
Wherein God's angels wait upon His poor,
And all men share one good ! An injury is it
That this fair kingdom should be wide as earth,
Citied on all the mountains of this world,
Rehearsal, glory-touched, of that great City
Which waits us in the heavens ? Enough of this.
My lord, what saith your England to these Customs?

BECKET.

I deem the people sound : gravely they love
Their ancient laws and immemorial freedom.

The nobles, save the noblest, back the king :
Their faith stands fast ; but all too lax their morals
To love a righteous law.

THE POPE.

How stand your clergy ?

BECKET.

The poor are true, the rich are panic-stricken :
We have corruptions: I had hoped ere now
To have pruned the worst away :—they grow and
flourish.

My sin has found me out !

THE POPE.

Your sin ? What sin ?

BECKET.

The king, who willed that I should be archbishop,
Was urgent with the Canterbury monks :
They raised no plaint ; yet some denied their free-
dom :
More late I too had doubts. To break my staff
In danger's hour had been a coward's part.
The danger 's past ; this hour I lodge that staff
In the strong hand of Peter's successor ;—
Be his to make decision.

(*The cardinals converse among themselves.*)

CARDINAL WILLIAM.

Holy Father,
Methinks the island prelate judges well ;
More sagely speaks he than King Henry's envoy
Whose Latin raised, last eve, a passing smile.
King Henry's wrath once lulled——

THE POPE.

It shall not be !
The Church gives honour—this the world should
know—
To those who honour her. This English primate
Who chides himself for lacking angel's heart,
Witnessed a man's heart in the Church's war ;—
She shall not fail him. Fit he is for rule :
His valour proved it, and his meekness proved it,
Bearing from one that served him just rebuke,
As Peter bare from Paul, and, since his time,
Popes many in this chair from humblest teachers.
Brother, resume your charge, and reign once more
In that fair see he founded who of old
From Gregory's convent and the Cœlian Hill
Descended to your England. For this fight,
Which shall not prove a flying season's sport,
All qualities are yours, save one—discretion.
Your life was long a life of courts, and camps,
And splendours of this world : at Pontigny,

A holier seat, find rest. Its reverend abbot
Will give you welcome.

THE ABBOT OF PONTIGNY.

Happy house is ours,
Welcoming a confessor !

BECKET.

The fast monastic,
The ascetic garb, and labour in the fields
Teach me humility !

THE POPE.

You shall not miss it ;
Your sacred habit be it mine to send :
It shall be honest serge.

SCENE IV.—THE PALACE AT ROUEN.

FITZ-URSE, WILLIAM DE TRACY, RICHARD BRITO,
HUGH DE MOREVILLE, *courtiers and ladies.*

FITZ-URSE.

As good as dead !

WILLIAM DE TRACY.

The three-days'-strangled dog
But fouls the air ; his bark is heard no more.

RICHARD BRITO.

At Sens the Sacred College frowned upon him,
 The Pope disfrocked ; the traitor fled by night
 To mate him with the antipope : to-day
 He lies in dungeon bound.

A LADY.

Some swear he 's mad ;
 I think he 's wedded.

DE MOREVILLE.

No ; though secularised ;—
 He keeps a Flemish farm.

FITZ-URSE (*to de Broc, entering*).

What news from home ?
 Some three weeks since you won the king's permission
 To drive that traitor's kin from England's shores.

DE BROC.

I bide my time. When falls the winter snow,
 That vermin brood shall face it.

[*Departs.*

A COURTIER.

Month by month
 His hate grows stronger.

FITZ-URSE.

Aye, there 's cause for that.

COURTIER.

The ravished Church lands and the heiress 'scaped ?

FITZ-URSE.

And cause beside. On some pretence of law
De Broc drove forth Idonea from the house
Of Becket's sister—Becket three months primate.
The maid took sanctuary in Canterbury.
Instant they sued her as a royal ward ;
Judgment against her went. The day had come,
And round the minster knights and nobles watched :
Rang out the chimes ; then slowly from the gate
Becket walked forth, the maiden by his side ;—
Aye, but her garb conventional show'd the nun !
They frowned, but dared no more. The King was
wroth,
And yet in part amused. De Broc arrived,
With face storm-black. Henry burst forth in laughter;
The infection spread—we laughed till heaven's broad
vault
Laughed back to hear us. Well, de Broc's my friend,
And reason is that hate in him should prosper.

SCENE V.—A ROOM IN THE ABBEY OF PONTIGNY.

BECKET, HERBERT OF BOSHAM, LLEWELLEN,
abbot and monks.

BECKET.

Praise be to God, and praise to her, His daughter,
This abbey, chaste and kind, of Pontigny,
That washed the wanderer's weary feet, and found
A country for the exile ! Reverend abbot,
I longed for this immersed in secular cares,
I longed for this throned on Augustine's seat,
A still retreat for penitence and prayer,
A quiet cell for books and meditation :
These things are mine.

ABBOT.

My lord, your holy joy
To us is both a kindling and a warning :
Our life is hard ; you teach us hardest life
Should be the sweetest. Heavenly is our hope ;
Your joy reminds us that even now our heaven,
An outer circle, girds the earth we tread,
Had we but faith to feel it. O my lord !
God grant that custom harden not in you
That sense to-day so tender ; for, the edge

Of spiritual sensibilities made blunt,
Our spiritual world becomes a leaf frost-curled ;
Not all the songs of angel hosts can charm us ;
We starve 'mid manna showers.

BECKET.

I have put aside
The canon law, and study lore dogmatic :
It better feeds the soul. The convent walls
Of Paris rise before me as of old :
Sure 't is a holy city !

ABBOT.

Once it was.

BECKET.

My mother, when I went to Paris first,
A slender scholar bound on quest of learning,
Girdling my gown collegiate, wept full sore ;
Then laid on me this hest ;—both early and late
To love Christ's Mother and the poor of Christ,
That so her prayer in heaven and theirs on earth,
Like angels by me as I walked its streets,
Might shield me from its sins.

ABBOT.

Men say your mother
Loved the poor well, and still on festivals,

Laying her growing babe in counter-scale,
 Heaped up an equal weight of clothes and food,
 Which unto them she gave.

BECKET.

She trained my sister
 To live an angel on the earth. Lo, there !
 The red morn widens through the falling snows,
 And the storm rocks your towers ! What then ? The
 spring
 Once more will come and wake that earliest flower
 Whose white is purer for its rim of green ;
 The thrush once more will sing.

HERBERT.

Your sycamore,
 Large-leaved, again will roof you as you read
 Those psalms that shook the Solomonian Temple.
 The apostolic letters which made glad
 The young and foe-girt churches of the Lord,
 And, dearer yet, the gospels whose warm lips
 Still kiss the Saviour's footsteps as he moves
 O'er earth.

BECKET.

And learn at last to be a Christian !

A MONK (*entering*).

A messenger, my lord. The Holy Father

Has sent that promised habit to his Grace,
Likewise these letters.

LLEWELLEN.

By St. David, good !

The hood is filled with snow ! The Pope knows well
Some heads are hot !

BECKET.

I kiss this habit's edge ;—

Herbert, what say the letters ?

HERBERT (*reading*).

' At one blow

King Henry confiscates the primate's goods,
Farms, manors, castles, rents.'

BECKET.

Now God be praised !

HERBERT (*reading*).

' His name is blotted from the service-books ;
Lastly, his friends are banished, kith and kin,
The old, the young, the cleric and the lay,
Widows and babes in arms, four hundred all;
His sister, sickness-worn ; the nun Idonea ;—
This day they plough the bleak, snow-blinded sea,
Oath-bound, to bear their wail beneath the gates
Of him their exile's cause, so named.'

A MONK.

Hark, hark !

ANOTHER MONK (*rushing in*).

A famished English host is wailing round us !
 They beat the gates ; they swarm into the courts ;
 They bear with them a woman three hours dead,
 And clamour for the archbishop.

SCENE VI.—PALACE OF THE EMPRESS MATILDA AT
 ROUEN.

THE EMPRESS, JOHN OF OXFORD.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Chiefly for pride his enemies arraign him :
 Great madam, pride not always is a vice :
 His pride is pride a son may well be proud of :
 He says, ‘ The daughter of earth’s wisest king
 Was greatest when she put her greatness off ;
 Is greater now, ruling through this strong arm,
 Than if, as once, she from her standard shook
 Dominion on the winds.’

THE EMPRESS.

King Henry’s daughter
 Should know some policy. I have lived, and reigned,

Done much, borne much, and in these later years
Much striven to win that docile heart which makes
Affliction's fruit, experience, profitable.
My end, they say, approaches. Till it comes
My counsel is my son's.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

His Highness grieves
He walked not by that counsel touching Becket,
Who, changed from better promise, plots, and schemes,
Made blind by lust of power, and greed beside
Of gold which perisheth.

THE EMPRESS.

He lives in exile ;
Watches by night, and toils all day afield,
In witness 'gainst the Customs.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Pardon, lady ;
He fled from England, not for conscience' sake,
But debtor fearing doom.

THE EMPRESS.

It may be so :
Much that I know of Thomas I mislike ;
But chiefly from his foes my knowledge comes :
Such knowledge I mistrust.

A CHAMBERLAIN (*entering*).

May it please your Highness,
A priest from Pontigny.

(JOHN OF SALISBURY enters accompanied by a veiled nun.)

THE EMPRESS.

You are come, I think,
Sir, from that abbey where the primate late
Of England, lives recluse?

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Illustrious lady,
The primate hath not ceased to be the primate.
In Oxford, madam, that religious seat,
When learning, tested, mounts the grades of merit,
Men say it graduates. Virtue, like learning,
Boasts its degrees of merit, tried and proved :
Its university is wide as earth :
My lord the primate hath proceeded exile ;—
The next degree, who knows?

THE EMPRESS.

I honour, sir,
Your frank, yet grave accost : I honour, too,
What under it I note, a loving zeal
For him you call your friend. Scant friends to me
Your primates and your prelates proved in England.

My father king, to me they made their oath ;
My father dead, they crowned revolted Stephen :
And though the usurper's brother, Henry of Winton,
More late my champion proved—that arm of might
Which waved my banner o'er the English realm—
He wrung from me concessions first; and, last,
Condoned his brother's crime and re-enthroned him.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Madam, that time erroneous, and unblest——

THE EMPRESS.

Back to our theme. I never loved your primate :
I deemed him for my son a dangerous friend,
Albeit an honest one. His elevation
I strenuously withheld. I saw in Thomas
One that, installed in Canterbury's chair,
Might shake a younger throne. I would your primate
Had let the Royal Customs be, and warred
Against the ill customs of the Church. 'T is shame
To ordain a clerk in name that lacks a cure,
Whom idleness must needs ensnare in crime ;
Scandal—and worse—to screen an erring clerk,
More fearing clamour than the cancer slow
Of inly-wasting sin. Scandal it is
When seven rich benefices load one priest—
Likeliest his soul's damnation.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Scandals indeed !

And no true friend to Thomas is the man
 Who palliates such abuses. For this cause,
 Reluctantly he grasped Augustine's staff,
 Therewith to smite them down. Madam, the men
 Who brand them most are those who breed the
 scandals,
 Now forcing hirelings into holy seats,
 Now keeping without pastors widowed sees :
 On such the primate warred. The king, to shield
 them,
 Invoked the Royal Customs.

THE EMPRESS.

Some are old.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Old by the Norman reckoning, not the Saxon.

THE EMPRESS.

Sir, sir, I know that cry—my throne it cost me !
 Penitent London, with the prodigal's zeal,
 Had spread to me its arms ; rebellion's head
 Lay bruised beneath my feet ; one common joy
 Beamed from the fronts of cleric, noble, serf :
 Sir, 'mid this new-born zeal a shout arose—

'The laws of good King Edward, not the Norman !'
I spurned that cry, and scarce escaped with life ;—
Return we to those Customs. Some are old.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Madam, at heart all sin is old as Cain.
What profit, lady, on the Judgment Day,
If kings that erred can say, 'By lineal right
That sin to me hereditary came,
And I entailed it on my latest heir ?'
Save—save your son !

THE EMPRESS.

The king advised not with me.
How many are those Customs you condemn ?

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Madam, sixteen are registered. Lo ! one :
'We suffer not appeal to Peter's chair.'
Madam, Christ said to Peter, 'Strengthen thou
Thy brethren.' Later, 'Feed my sheep and lambs.'
Shall England's Church, Augustine's child and Rome's,
Be sundered from his aid ?

THE EMPRESS.

Now, God forbid !

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

The next : 'No bishop shall depart the realm

Without the king's consent.' Such laws in force,
Church councils are no more.

THE EMPRESS.

That Custom 's novel !

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

The next : 'No baron holding from the Crown,
Whate'er his crime, shall feel the Church's censure
Without the king's approval.' Madam, Christ
Gave to the Church His keys, and bade her use them,
That so her precinct virgin might remain
From foot impure. The great exempt, the mean
Must needs their license share.

THE EMPRESS.

That Custom 's old,
Yet never should be used to shelter sinners:
The Church is mistress of her sacraments ;
Else were God's temple to a tavern changed,
Or den of thieves.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

The next : 'When bishoprics
Are vacant, till the king hath willed the election
Their rents with him remain.'

JOHN OF OXFORD (*rising*).

May it please your Highness,
Humbly I take my leave.

THE EMPRESS.

Sir, fare you well !

[*John of Oxford departs.*

These Customs are in part of recent date ;
In part are ancient, and throughout are strained :
My son has erred, enrolling them as laws ;
Not thus my father wrought—has erred besides
Requiring from the bishops pledge to keep them :
We kept, till now, rule and exception both,
Which housed together in uneasy friendship :—
Your primate errs, I think, in nobler sort :
Let him endure the earlier of those Customs,
So they remain unwrit.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Madam, your words
Are truth and peace.

THE EMPRESS.

I ever loved truth well ;
Alas, not peace ! Yet gladly, ere I die,
Would I have portion with the peace-makers.

I will not more detain you, sir. Commend me
Unto my lord the primate.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Royal lady,
This youthful nun—Idonea is her name,
And something of her history may have reached you—
Is missioned with a message to your ear.
The maid is true : may God protect your Highness !

[John of Salisbury bows low, and departs.]

THE EMPRESS.

I pray you lift your veil : that hand, I think,
Derives from ancient lineage, and like light
Shows on your sable garb.

(IDONEA lifts her veil.)

There 's rest in gazing
Upon a countenance nor by passions marred,
Nor fretted by perplexities of thought.
You are older than you seem. You have known grief,
But mourned nor husband dead nor lover false :
I deem you orphan.

IDONEA.

I have lost my parents.

THE EMPRESS.

And recently, I think ?

IDONEA.

My second mother
Expired but few weeks since. She was of those
Exiled of late—the primate's widowed sister ;—
In the great storm she died.

THE EMPRESS.

That churl de Broc
Outstepped his warrant.

IDONEA.

'Mid celestial choirs
One note is added to her song on earth—
The sweetest ! I have heard it in my dreams,
And walked the long day after as on air.
Not now she sings alone the peace of heaven,
The bliss of Saints ; she sings their joy not less
Who share on earth the Saviour's crown of thorns.
What other joy like that of sacrifice ?
Without it love were nought. In death she lay,
A lovely shape that seemed to smile in sleep,
And placid as the snowy fields around.
Her brother raised this crucifix from her breast,
And bade me bear it to you. 'Let her wear it
In death,' he said, 'and it will bring her peace ;
And, wearing it, let her win back her son,
Who walks in ways of death.'

THE EMPRESS.

Flatterers, not friends,
Are now my son's advisers. I could wish
That late born hatred 'twixt him and the primate
Changed to old love.

IDONEA.

O lady, deem it not !
The primate hate your son ! How many a time
Have I not heard him praise the king's high heart ;
His wit at years when others chase their follies ;
His prescient thought ; his knowledge won from all,
Drawn in with every breath ; his wind-like swiftness,
Now here, now there ; persistence iron-nerved,
Pliant at need, but with resilience still
Back-springing to a purpose of that height
Which makes ambition virtue. From him shake
But two fierce passions which convulse his spirit
(Anger was one, he did not name the other),
No prince there reigns like him.

THE EMPRESS.

The heart of Thomas
Was ever large ; that know I well.

IDONEA.

Full oft

I have heard him cast the royal horoscope :
‘ Let him be England’s king, a child of England !
If all the world beside were his for realm,
The solid centre ’s there : his home be England !
Let him sun out its virtues with his love ;
Strike off its bonds ; unite its rival races ;
Restore old usages ; replant the poor
In those huge forests now the hunter’s spoil ;
Be loved at English hearths ! ’

THE EMPRESS.

My son’s ambition
Hath wider scope than England.

IDONEA.

That ambition,
The primate says, may likewise reach its goal
If so God wills it, and the weal of man.
He too may build, like Charlemagne, true empire,
If loyal, like that earlier, unto Christ,
Rebuild, besides, God’s realm in Holy Land :
All this is in his hope.

THE EMPRESS.

Who hopes so much
Must love my son. I also hope for him—
Hope, but with fear. In Thomas he had found

At least an honest friend, and fearless one :
Thomas is Norman half ; English by culture ;
And Norman daring wed with English truth
Hath in him bred a hardy race of virtues.

IDONEA.

A mother's counsel—

THE EMPRESS.

He revered it once :
That queen of his hath slain his reverence ;
That woman with five realms and fifty devils,
Who witched him to her love. She loved him never ;
And with her strident voice and angry eyes
Scared from her soon his heart. A faithfuller husband
Had been obsequious less. A wife ! a wife !
You on whose brows virginity is throned
Are liker to a wife than Eleanor !
In that obdurate will, and lawless humour,
And shallow heart, despite all marriage bonds,
Wifehood's true spirit had been impossible
Even had she loved him well ! A married mistress
Let such be called. Prop me this pillow, child,
And put from you that wildered, frightened look.
My father—him I loved the most on earth ;—
If wars 1 moved, if these thin fingers clutched

The sceptre all too tight, 't was for this cause,
Because his hand had held it !

IDONEA.

Gracious lady—

THE EMPRESS.

Come near, and lay your lily cheek near mine ;
But touch not mine, or yours will catch its fever.
Fix now your eyes on yonder winding Seine,
Seen 'twixt the crowded city towers. Mark there
How yon unladen barks run down the river :—
So lightly issues forth our youth's emprise
Full-sailed to shores unknown. Mark next how slowly
Those barges cargo-burthened mount the stream
With paintul toil, and oars that keep not time ;—
Thus—youth gone by—fortunes fulfilled oppress us ;
The tide against us works.

IDONEA.

Lady, our pains
Are helpfuller than our joys ; they lead to God ;
And in the fulness of that joy He gives
Is no deceit.

THE EMPRESS.

Where lodge you, child ?

IDONEA.

I know not.

THE EMPRESS.

Rest then in yonder convent, sunset-gilt :
I built it, and they love me. Ere you sleep
Give me a prayer. Our faith remains ; our prayer
Grows cold with age—at least the prayer of princes.
Maid, I have heard your name ; seen you ere now,
But know not where. The Pope hath sent me missives,
Praying mine intercession with my son ;—
He hath it ; but in limits. Child, farewell !

[*Idonea kneels, kisses the Empress' hand, and withdraws.*

SCENE VII.—THE ABBEY OF PONTIGNY.

BECKET, JOHN OF SALISBURY.

BECKET.

Still, by my soul, I think he may be honest :—
The fraudulent are the weak ; the king, we know,
Is strong alike in body and in mind.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

But not, alas ! in spirit. ‘Strength to bring forth.’

The lack of faith is oftenest lack of strength,
Of spiritual strength—lack, too, of spiritual courage:
Worldlings are all too craven to believe.
This king lacks faith, and knows not that he lacks it ;
He still was superstitious more than godly :
Seeing he sees not, and in blindness thus
Tramples his good. His youth had soaring aims——

BECKET.

Still unfulfilled. We must have patience with him !
God gives to man his threescore years and ten,
Then patient stands to see if in those years
His snail-paced creature makes one hour's advance.
I counted patience once man's humblest virtue :
I grow to count it of God's attributes,
Well nigh the marvellous most. Return to Henry !
His forefathers, like him, when wroth, were mad :
His empire 's vaster far than theirs ; his pride
Proportionately entempested. I think it—
I hope it, honest error.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

The spirit of Bernard
Hangs on this pure and hallowed air. Your brow
Was furrowed once ; to-day it wears no frown :
His Holiness did well to send you hither.

BECKET.

Leisure and peace, and communings with God
Above the glebe new-turned, when fresh and sweet
Rises earth's breath, and in the thicket near
The unimpatient bird-song, evening-lulled,
Is soberer than at dawn, must help, I think,
Attuned by daily offices divine,
And faces calm wherein the chaunt lives on
When psalms are o'er—must help to soften hearts
How hard soe'er, and softening them, to brighten.
Here learn we that, except through sin of man,
There 's evil none on earth—not pain, not scorn,
Not death ! How well they name that stream
‘Serene !’
Serene it wanders from the chestnut forests,
Serene it whispers through yon orchard bowers,
Serene it slides along the convent walls :
It counts the hours ;—even now the sun descends,
And therefore in its breathless mirror glow
The gold-green pillars of those limes beside it.
This spot is surely holier than men know ;
I think some saint died here !

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Yet here, even here,
The battle of all ages lies before us !

BECKET.

Well know I that, my friend. This eve I mused
On war, with heart at peace.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Beneath yon beech
You read a book——

BECKET.

St. Anselm's. Holy souls
This book hath holier made ; for me, a sinner,
It serves a humbler part. My lot is war :
But close beside me scoffs a voice malign,
' Thy youth vain-glorious sought the tented field,
From haughty stomach, or from angry spleen ;—
So now ; for nought thou rend'st the world asunder.'
In doubt I stand : then comes to me this book,
And saith, ' Thy cause is Anselm's :—who was he ?
This was no brawler, and no voice of war :
This was a soul that in the cloistral shade
Had reached the sixth fair decade of his life,
O'erstepped the threshold of the eternal Sabbath ;
This was a virgin spirit—one to whom
Man's praise seemed blot and blame ; an infant spirit
Whose meekness nothing earthly could affront ;
An angel spirit that, with feet on earth,

Saw still God's face in heaven:
Certes he sought no battles ; yet he found them ;
Long agonies of conflict in old age,
An exiled man, or fronting hostile kings.'
The tempter leaves me ; and my strength returns ;—
But lo, Guarine, our abbot !

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Slow his step :
He comes ; yet halts.

BECKET.

I know what makes him sad :
The king has sworn, unless they drive me hence,
To lay on each Cistercian house in England
That hand which cannot reach to Pontigny.
Solve we this good man's doubt.

THE ABBOT (*joining them*).

Alas, my lord——

BECKET.

My kind and generous friend, we part to-morrow !
God wills it thus, not any earthly king :
We have had our rest. It nerves us for that toil
Which summons us once more.

THE ABBOT.

Pavia's bishop

And Citeaux's abbot fear——

BECKET.

A successor

Of mine one day in Canterbury's chair,
Exile, like me, at Pontigny, will help
To pay my debt of love. Meantime, my friend,
This work is God's. Draw near me, and hear all.
The morn your predecessor left this abbey,
Lifted, reluctant, to the pastoral charge,
I at St. Stephen's altar said my mass ;
And, offering my thanksgiving there——But no !
When next at Lyons, ask my lord archbishop ;
He stood behind a pillar, and heard all.
Brother, farewell. God guard this temple well !
His Spirit be its light, till Christ shall come
To judge the world :—and if through Satan's fraud,
The wrath of kings, the madness of the people,
It suffer wrong, may He with His own hand
Once more uplift it to a tenfold glory
Which shall not fail or fade. Once more, farewell.

SCENE VIII.—A BAY-WINDOW IN THE PALACE AT
LE MANS.

KING HENRY, JOHN OF OXFORD.

KING HENRY.

I am ill at ease, good John. Some fate malignant
Drags still my fortunes from their starry way
And drowns them in the mist. His kinsfolk's exile
Blackened my name with Christendom's abhorrence ;
The traitor's self, cast forth from Pontigny,
Stands stronger than before.

It may be I was rash. So deems my mother,
A politic head that never loved the priests :
She warns me to revolt not 'gainst the Church,
Lest God should rouse my sons, in turn revolted,
One day to plague their sire.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

May it please you, sir,
Sickness, a superstitious thing, and death,
Whose coming shadow casts a ghostly semblance
On commonest shapes, perturb her mind, else strong.

KING HENRY.

My barons in this battle with the Church

Serve me with soul divided. Becket's eye
Went through them at Northampton. Becket's
legate :—

Ere long the man will hurl a Censure forth :
My bishops weep and wail to me to spare them,
Nor dash them dead against the canon law :
The Emperor wanes ; his antipope wastes daily :
The Pope is waxing, and he knows his power.
I have lit my camp-fires on a frozen flood ;—
Methinks, the ice wears thin.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Retreat is none.

KING HENRY.

To Rome then ! Haste ! you head our embassy :
Within this paper are your orders writ :
Concession—aye, but definite, sharp, and strong,
Those lines which keep our citadel intact,
The essence and the pith of all I strove for.
Be this your chart.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Sire, if it please your Highness,
This battle, though a hard one, shall be gained,
Two things conditioned—freedom and a purse.
Cramp not my movements : definite rules and limits

I never loved. This day the skilfullest hand
In tracing such should weave but nets to cage
Your royal purpose, or a rope to choke it.
The serpent's finer wisdom helps us oft
No more than plain simplicity of doves ;
The fox's vulgarer craft serves then our need.
Leave terms to me ; but grant me wide credentials :
Then, when my mission's over, with my work
Deal at your will.

KING HENRY.

I see it, John. So be it !
Hark to that horn !

JOHN OF OXFORD.

The prince returned from chase !

(PRINCE HENRY *rides up with attendants, bearing a dead stag, and stops under the window.*)

PRINCE HENRY.

Father, against your will or with your will,
This stag, my first, finds way to my old master ;—
Hate him who likes : I love him ! (*gallops on.*)

KING HENRY.

From that brow
The sunrise looks of empire ne'er to set !

For him it is I toil.

Good John, my recent illness—and ill dreams—
Had shaken me some whit ; that ague's past :
See, I tear up this paper ! You are free.
Of all my foes this man alone, this Becket,
Hath marred and dwarfed me in my own esteem :
And for that cause I hate him. Friend, make speed !

JOHN OF OXFORD.

To Cologne first, your Highness ; then to Rome—
More popes than one to deal with !

SCENE IX.—VEZELAY.

BECKET, JOHN OF SALISBURY, HERBERT OF BOSHAM,
ABBOT OF PONTIGNY.

BECKET.

My patience less hath served him than disserved :
He stands upon the imminent verge of schism,
Transacts, conspires, with that revolted prelate
Who, with the Emperor and his antipope,
Stands third in Satan's court. Is mine the offence ?
Lo, here mine earliest letter !

JOHN OF SALISBURY (*reading it*).

'King and lord,
 Within your realm the Spouse of Christ hath wrong,
 A queen in every kingdom, though a guest.
 Remember, sire, that oath you sware, new-crowned,
 Spreading the parchment on the altar-stone,
 To keep the Church in peace ! Old Theobald
 Blessed you that day :—would God that I might bless
 you !
 Your subject I, and yield you reverence due ;
 Your father, and my duty is to warn.'
 Was that too keen ?

THE ABBOT.

I deem not so.

BECKET.

My letters

Have ever breathed that strain. Last week, in turn,
 Thus writes he to the apostate of Cologne :
 'Pope Alexander, and his cardinals false,
 Who prop that traitor Thomas, from this hour
 Shall boast mine aid no more.' What say ye, sirs ?

HERBERT.

A legate's powers are yours.

BECKET.

I heeded seldom
My personal wrongs ; but thus to trade with sin,
In huckstering sort to barter Christian honour,
Or simulate the crime he dares not act—
I say 't is foul, 't is foul !

HERBERT.

At Clarendon
A second council meets. The bishops there
Must swear—so wills their lord—to eschew henceforth
All laws not royal, all appeals to Rome :—
Our English Church shall stand, with bleeding flank,
From Christendom down cloven.

BECKET (*rising*).

One time in me
Passions of earth commixed with zeal divine :
That time should now be past. At Pontigny
Two years I kept my vigil and my fast ;
In reverence touched the dark breast of the earth
From which we came, to which we shall return :
My vanities, I trust, are dead.

THE ABBOT.

They are.

BECKET.

Then action's time is come. At Soissons late
 I watched three nights before three saintly shrines,
 Praying for strength. It comes to me this hour.
 England no more shall lie a corse : a spirit
 Shall lift once more that head blasphemers spurn ;
 To the dried arm the flesh shall come as flesh
 Pure in the child. No more the wail shall rise
 From vacant minsters—yea, from Christian babes
 Amerced of Christian food. Bring forth the parch-
 ments !
 From him, the crowned transgressor, to the least,
 The Censure falls on all.

THE ARCHBISHOP OF SENS (*entering*).

Your Grace has heard it ?—
 The English king lies sick.

BECKET.

Lies sick—alas !

I war not on the sick.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

The king excepted,
 The Censure 's nought. The heart of England burns,
 And waits that stroke which, troubling not allegiance
 In civil things, keeps pure the things of God.

A frost will fall upon that fiery heart,
The chiefest culprit spared.

BECKET.

Let come what may,
I strike not him that 's down. My lord archbishop,
You come in time to hear the unrighteous banned
For crimes reiterate and denounced long since.
We sever from the Church the Church's foes,
Henceforth to plot outside her. John of Oxford,
Richard of Ilchester, Thomas Fitz-Bernard,
Joceline of Salisbury bishop, Hugh St. Clare,
De Luci, yokemate in the guilt of others,
Joceline of Ballol, and, of baser sort,
Bandit, not knight, de Broc, one time a monk.
Sirs, write ye down the sentence : be it hung
On all the city gates through France and England ;
From all the altars be it sounded forth,
With tapers flung to the earth.

SCENE X.—THE SEA-SIDE, NEAR SOUTHAMPTON.

GILBERT FOLIOT, JOHN OF OXFORD, THE BISHOP OF
HEREFORD.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

I have saved you a sea-voyage, good my lord !

To London, at your ease ! My lord of Hereford
May join your homeward way.

GILBERT.

I tell you, John,
That Censure, like a dragon's tongue in the dust,
Hath sucked us insects up ! The best is cowed :
Who swaggered three weeks since, to-day walks softly
As one that mourns his mother. Bend we must ;—
I fling me at his feet.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Hear first my news :
Two legates from the Holy See make speed
To arbitrate our feuds. Till these have reached us
The thunders of our earlier legate sleep ;—
I keep my stall at Salisbury.

GILBERT.

Ha ! Henceforth
Thomas no bishop is of mine for ever !
Thy tale, good John !

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Aye, aye, you 'll hear me now !
We found the Holy City black as night,
The court with iron walled, and barred against us :—
The gold key let me in.

GILBERT.

You saw the Pope?

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Saw him, and showed a letter from the king,
Conceding me full powers ;—frankly accepting
All terms by me accepted. Next I swore
That compact with the antipope at Cologne
Against his Highness charged, was false as hell.
Some youthful cardinal called me ‘valiant Swearer :’
The rest sat statue-still.

GILBERT.

The Holy Father?

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Stately he sat, and cold ;—my terms demanded :
I saw the time for chaffering was gone by :
‘What terms,’ I asked, ‘can Christian kings desire,
Save those the Church ordains?’

GILBERT.

You swore to that?

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Yea, though my brother envoys called me ‘traitor :’
They railed in English ; so the harm was ’scaped.
Next swore I that the Customs should surcease :

Last, that with Becket peace should be contracted ;
The Pope to name conditions.

GILBERT.

He believed you ?

JOHN OF OXFORD.

My praise is greater if he disbelieved,
Since forced he was to simulate belief !
The king will ratify his envoy's oath—
Explained perchance—or else at will disown it :
Meantime our bark is lifted o'er the shoal
By one great wave—I felt it grating twice—
And rides deep waters.

GILBERT.

When the king demands—

JOHN OF OXFORD.

I am but envoy ; wits he hath scholastic :
With such the royal conscience may consult.

GILBERT.

'Gainst Peter's rock I dash henceforth this Becket ;
Him and his Censures both.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

To London, bishop !

And bid the joy bells peal.

SCENE XI.—ABBEY OF ST. COLOMBE, NEAR SENS.

BECKET, ARCHBISHOP OF SENS, HERBERT OF BOSHAM.

ARCHBISHOP OF SENS.

Your king was fierce against you once, my lord ;
At last his winter turns to spring.

BECKET.

He changes :

His mind's conclusion varies with the times :
We have a better augury : his heart
Is good, and only on the good in man
The better can be built. The king, when crowned
At Gloucester, laid his crown upon the altar,
And vowed no more to wear it. Late when sick,
Deeming death near, he chose for burial-place
No sepulchre of kings, but some poor church
Where slept a saint of God.

HERBERT.

Meantime o'er England
The breath of God hath blown. The Royal Customs
Find not this hour an adulating tongue.
The bishops, vassals late of servile fear,
Through holier fear have burst that baser bond,

And rush across the sea to pledge new faith.
Here comes a friend from Rome;—How stand we there?
If well, then all is well.

JOHN OF SALISBURY (*entering*).

My lord, ill news!

The royal Swearer swore his way through all ;
The cardinals stared, the Holy Father doubted ;
His doubts were vain ; once more the Swearer swore,
Alternative was none save hollow peace
Or war without a foe.

BECKET.

What swore this Swearer ?

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

He swore the king should grant the Pope's demands
How vast soe'er, the Pope appointing legates
To adjudicate our cause.

BECKET.

The Pope replied,
' Long since, and unsolicited by man,
My legate I appointed ; he hath judged ;
Remains but this—to enforce a righteous sentence.'
Replied not thus the Pope ?

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Alas, not so !

BECKET.

Have they no names? those arbiters—those legates?

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Pavia's Cardinal and Cardinal Otho.

BECKET.

The first, mine enemy declared ; the last,
A doubtful friend. Victory in victory's hour,
Dries up, like Jonah's gourd !
This new commission supersedes the old.
How stands the Censure ?

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Men in peril of death,
Until their case is sifted, are absolved.

BECKET.

I knew it ! Where 's the man in days like these,
All Wales aflame once more, who walks not perilled?
The Censure 's censured, and my name is made
A laughter to the world.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

This pact is secret :
The injury 's deadly, but the insult 's spared.

AN ATTENDANT (*entering with a letter for Becket*).
Brought by a courier from my lord of Rouen.

BECKET (*reads*).

“ Trust not in princes,” wear they mitre or crown !
King Henry maddens with his Roman triumph ;
He boasts the names of those who clutched his gold ;
Extols the Pope ; to England hastes ; reports
Your office cancelled.’ Write, good Herbert, write—
There’s one at least in Rome whom I can trust,
One near the Pope—in my name write, and thus :
‘ Once more Barabbas is released ; once more
The Just is crucified. His little ones,
The homeless, and the wretched, and the meek,
Are hurled abroad in hunger, while the impure
With monarchs make their feast. My part is done ;
I fought God’s cause, and unto God I leave it.
I sue, no more, tribunals of this world ;
In them let sinners trust !’

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

My lord, your greatness
Yields to the humblest liberty of speech.
Send not to Rome such missive ! Who sits there,
Sits on God’s tower, and further sees than we.

BECKET.

A just reproof : I should not have forgotten ;—
His realm is Christendom’s unmeasured orb,

That which it is, and that which it shall be ;
To him earth's kingdoms are but provinces,
Revolted some, within his Master's kingdom.
He must be patient, lest, in raising one,
He spurn its neighbour, tottering. Woe is me !
I am an islander with narrow heart,
And England-fastened eyes. I see my country,
Her laws made null by modern instances,
Her Scriptures by traditions slain of men,
Her poor down-trampled 'neath a bestial hoof ;
Yea, scandals worse than these—subverted virtue ;
Honour, long-outraged, ceasing from its shame ;
The salt o' the earth daily its savour losing,
Self-sentenced to be trodden under foot.
Write thou to Rome ; be mine the heart alone
That bleeds beneath thy words—write, 'Holy Father !
My spirit is in bitterness this day.
The endurance and the hopes of years are lost ;
Henceforth what malefactor fears Church censures ?
Who rises o'er the fear of worldly censors ?
Sequestered are seven fair English sees,
Abbeys untold.' They bid me to be patient !
Tell him that time makes patience sin ; the years
Work for the foe, not us.

AN ATTENDANT (*entering*).

Two cardinal legates,

But late commissioned from the Holy See,
Desire my lord the primate.

(CARDINAL WILLIAM OF PAVIA and CARDINAL OTHO
enter.)

CARDINAL OTHO.

Please it, your Grace,
In northward progress to King Henry's court
We make delay, zealous once more to see you,
And learn your Grace's judgment of this time.

BECKET.

My lords, your Eminences both are welcome.

JOHN OF SALISBURY (*to the Archbishop of Sens.*)

Was ever change like that? But now his face
Was as a tempest's heart; 't is now a heaven
Incapable of cloud.

ARCHBISHOP.

The princely nature,
The oppression past, regains its native calm
As by some natural law.

CARDINAL OTHO.

My lord archbishop,
A mutinous world uplifts this day its front

Against Christ's Vicar ! Save this France and England,
I know not kingdom sound. The antipope,
Propred by the emperor——

BECKET.

Name him not ! That puppet,
Like frailer favourites of the Imperial fancy,
Shall have his day and pass.

CARDINAL WILLIAM.

My lord archbishop,
We, uninspired, and shaped of common clay,
Can judge but of the present by the past,
And deem the Church sore set. Your English king,
Faithful till now, at last—we know it—wavers,
And makes his bargain with the antipope :
He was your pupil, through your wisdom, wise ;
He was your playmate, mirthful at your jest ;
Your minstrel, ever singing of your praise ;
From height to height he raised you. If he looked
For grateful love, a credulous hope is venial :
He says that you have raised two realms against him,
Flanders, and France.

BECKET.

Your Eminence may hear
From sources surer than that insect swarm

Which buzzes round the tingling ears of greatness,
 From Louis, King of France, that from the first
 I counselled him to peace. Lord cardinal,
 My sin is this : to stand a living man
 Where welcomer were a corpse—
 I, not his flatterers, love my king and serve him
 Speaking that truth which not to speak to kings,
 Who seldom hear it, is the crown of treason ;—
 Traitors are they, not I.

CARDINAL WILLIAM.

The king complains
 That you reject as new his Royal Customs.

BECKET.

I bid him to reject that vice of kings
 Which strangles earliest laws by modern Customs ;
 My lord, that vice is pride ; that pride is royal,
 But not the royallest royalty—not the lasting ;
 I bid him but to fling from him that vice,
 And reign a great, sane king.

CARDINAL WILLIAM.

A text there is
 That ‘ we are nothing better than our sires : ’
 Why not, my lord, in general terms, engage

That what past prelates to their kings conceded,
Therein you 'll stint him not? In days like these,
The royal hand a-dipping in your dish,
Some plausible pretence—

BECKET.

I ever scorned
Your plausible pretence. My lord, that water
Wherein of old the unjust judge washed his hands
Is extant still upon the earth, and streams
Perennial from that fountain-head accursed
By him that day infected, through all lands,
The bath of service which would serve two masters,
The font where specious virtue finds again
Her sin original, and to Christ's foe
Demurely is baptised. Barbaric I—
Child of the northern forest, not of plains
In wine and oil redundant. I long since
Have known this thing and scorned it.

CARDINAL WILLIAM.

Lord archbishop,
That freedom which the Pope from you permits
I need not grudge. In turn I too speak plainly :
My lord, through you the Church is ill at ease,
All Christendom perturbed. Resign, my lord!

Taranto, Southern Italy's chief see,
A northern saint its founder, lacks a shepherd,
And spreads to you her arms.

BECKET.

Lord cardinal,
The chair of Peter in its own good time
Shall judge these Royal Customs. When that Voice,
At times with baser sounds commixed, sends forth
Authentic and oracular o'er the earth
Its great award, there lives not who shall bend
A humbler forehead to that hest than I.
If that award should free from servile yoke
My country and her Church, then sit who will
In St. Augustine's chair. If that award
Should throne the ill use, Augustine's chair dishonour,
I ask no see in Italy or France,
By Seine, or Tiber, or the Tyrrhene wave ;
I claim a hermit's cell 'mid England's woods,
Or where her wave-worn rocks are desolate most,
Wherein to sing my penitential psalms,
Poor vespers of a life ill-spent. Till then
I flee not from my post.

CARDINAL OTHO.

My lord archbishop,

We honour your great heart and manly speech,
~~And~~ bid your Grace farewell.

[*The Cardinals depart, attended.*

BECKET (*after long musing*).

near ?

681 JOHN OF SALISBURY.

My lord, I stand beside you.

BECKET.

oudless heaven the sun still shines ;
The birds sing still ; the peasant breaks the clod ;
Not less a change hath come upon the earth—
Fear nought !

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

I trust that all may yet go well.

BECKET.

I looked for trials—aye, but not from him :—
The good French king will be the next to leave me.

(*After a pause.*)

All shall go well—but in another sort
Than I had hoped till now.

Taranto, Southern Italy's chief see,
A northern saint its founder, lacks a shepherd,
And spreads to you her arms.

BECKET.

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The chair of Peter in its own good time
Shall judge these Royal Customs. When that Voice,
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7

[*The Cardinals depart, attended.*

BECKET (*after long musing*).

near?

681

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

My lord, I stand beside you.

BECKET.

In yonder cloudless heaven the sun still shines ;
The birds sing still ; the peasant breaks the clod ;
Not less a change hath come upon the earth—
Fear nought !

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

I trust that all may yet go well.

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I looked for trials—aye, but not from him :—
The good French king will be the next to leave me.

(*After a pause.*)

All shall go well—but in another sort
Than I had hoped till now.

Tarar
A n
Ay



ACT IV.

SCENE I.—THE PALACE OF THE EMPRESS MATILDA
AT ROUEN.

THE EMPRESS, IDONEA.

THE EMPRESS.

Speak on, my child. Windsor's old oaks once more,
As of your merry stag-hunts you discoursed,
Above me sighed, and kindlier airs than those
Which now I breathe with pain. Speak thou ; I listen.
If I had had such brother ! Yours is dead.
Such loss means this, that he—none else—shall walk
Beside you still, when all save him are grey,
In youth unchanged.

IDONEA.

Not Time itself could change him !
That light which cheers me still from eyes unseen,
That wild sweet smile around imagined lips,
A moment's breathless, magic visitation,



Which falls upon me like a kiss and flies,
Are scarcely more with youth perpetual bright
Than was his spirit. Mind he seemed, all mind !
In childhood flower, and weed, and bird, and beast,
Nature's fair pageant to the eye of others,
To him was that and more. Old Bertram said
There lurked more insight in his pupil's questions
Than in conclusions of the sage self-styled.
He never had grown old !

THE EMPRESS.

His youth, I trust,
Was to such childhood faithful.

IDONEA.

More than faithful !
Vivacities of young intelligence
Were merged, not lost, in kindlings of a soul
Where Thought and Love seemed one. He trod on
earth
The Saviour's ; yea, and Mary's. All things shone
Beauteous to him, for God shone clear through all :
His longing was to free the Tomb of Christ,
Fighting in Holy Land. Death's early challenge
Pleased him not less. 'Thank God ! that Holy Land
Was dear,' he said ;—'more dear, more near, is
Heaven !'

THE EMPRESS (*after a long silence*).

At twenty years—had my son died at twenty—
 The last great day alone can answer that.
 I did my best, at one time not in vain,
 To stay that fatal war 'twixt him and Becket
 Which only wastes him like an atrophy—
 Thenceforth you were alone.

IDONEA.

Not that first month :
 Near me that time he seemed—a spiritual nearness
 Impossible, I think, to flesh and blood :
 Terrestrial life returned. 'T was then I wept.

THE EMPRESS.

Peace came at last.

IDONEA.

'T was in a church, one even :—
 The choir had closed their books ; but still on high
 Rolled on the echoes of their last 'Amen.'
 Something within me sobbed, 'Amen, so be it.'
 I wept no more.

THE EMPRESS.

Nay, nay, the dead have claims :
 I love not those who cheat them of their due.'
 Child, grief is grief.

IDONEA.

I clasped it as God's gift,
And 'twixt my bosom and my arms it vanished.
Some wound seemed staunched. My body still was
weak :

Wintry the woods : yet in my soul the more
God's happy spring made way. Slowly within me
My childhood's wish returned—to live a nun :
I deemed it first presumption ; yea temptation ;
It changed to hope. Faint was that hope, and like
The greening verge of some young tree in March,
When all its bulk is dark.

THE EMPRESS.

At last hope conquered.

IDONEA.

By hindrance helped. I seem to you unwedded :
Yet when the irrevocable vow was breathed
'T was as a bride I felt—His bride, for Whom
Love grows divine through measureless Obedience.
My brother too—while we were children both,
In loving, I obeyed him. Some there were
Who mocked me with the name of 'Little wife.'
I weep him still ; yet laugh at mine own tears,
Knowing that he I weep is throned in heaven.

THE EMPRESS.

A more than kingly lot !

IDONEA.

And yet how great,
If judged aright, the meanest life on earth !
Our convent looks on cottage-sprinkled vales :
Far, far below, now winds the marriage pomp,
The funeral now. O, who could see such things,
Nor help the world with prayer ?

THE EMPRESS.

What see you, child ?

IDONEA.

An Eden, weed-o'ergrown, but still an Eden ;
Man's noble life—a fragment, yet how fair !
My father, pilgrim once in southern lands,
Groping 'mid ruins, found a statue's foot,
And brought it home. I gazed upon it oft
Until its smiling curves and dimpled grace
Showed me the vanished nymph from foot to brow,
Majestical and sweet. Man's broken life
Shows like that sad, sweet fragment.

THE EMPRESS.

Life, my child,

In times barbaric is a wilderness :
In cultured times a street, or wrangling mart :
We bear it, for we must.

IDONEA.

O madam, madam,
God made man's life : it is a holy thing !
What constitutes that life ? The Virtues, first ;
That sisterhood divine, brighter than stars,
And diverse more than stars, than gems, than blossoms ;
The Virtues are our life in essence ;—next,
Those household ties which image ties celestial ;
Lastly, life's blessed sorrows. They alone
Rehearse the Man of Sorrows ; they alone
Fit us for life with Him.

THE EMPRESS.

To you man's life

Is prospect, child : to me 't is retrospect :
They that best know it neither love nor hate.
It hath affections, sorrowful things and sweet :
My share was mine, as daughter and as mother.
It hath its duties, stately taskmasters,
Exacting least in age, when, thanks to God,
At last the unselfish heart is forced upon us,
Our time for joy gone by. It hath its cares :

It hath its passions—mine was once ambition ;
And, lastly, it hath death.

IDONEA.

And death is peace.

THE EMPRESS.

Then death and sleep are things, alas, unlike :
Unpeaceful dreams make my nights terrible—
The spectres of past days. Last night I seemed
Once more, as one whom midnight dangers scare,
To rush, 'mid blinding snows, with frozen feet
O'er the rough windings of an ice-bound river,
The shout of them that chased me close behind,
The wolf-cry in the woods.

IDONEA.

That flight from London,
Madam, was yours in sleep.

THE EMPRESS.

Once more I dreamed :
Once more I fled through false and perjured lands,
Insurgent coasts of rebels vowed to slay me ;
I lay within a coffin, on a bier,
With feet close tied. Fierce horsemen galloped past ;
At times the traveller or the clown bent o'er me,
And careless said, 'A corpse.'

IDONEA.

In such sad seeming
You 'scaped from Bristol.

THE EMPRESS.

Worse, far worse, remained ;
I heard once more the widows' wail at Gloucester ;
At Winchester and Worcester once again,
Above the crackling of the blazing roofs,
I heard the avenging shout that hailed me queen,
And, staying not the bloodshed, shared the sin.
That hour of dream swelled out to centuries ;
A year so racked would seem eternity :—
Our penance such may prove.

IDONEA.

Madam, your strength——

THE EMPRESS.

A place there is which fits us for that heaven
Where nought unclean can live : else were we hopeless.
How think you of that region ?

IDONEA.

Madam, thus :

That bourne is peace, since therein every will
Is wholly one with His, the Will Supreme ;

Is gladness, since deliverance there is sure ;
Is sanctity, since punishment alone
Of sin remains—sin's least desire extinct—
And yet is pain not less.

THE EMPRESS.

There should be pain ;—
Speak on ; speak truth ; I ne'er had gifts of fancy :
Truth is our stay in life, and more in death.

IDONEA.

'T is pain love-born, and healed by love. On earth
Best Christian joy is joy in tribulation,
The noblest and the best. In that pure realm
Our tribulation also is the noblest :
'T is pain of love that grieves to see not God.

THE EMPRESS.

Here too sin hides from us God's face ; yet here
Feebly we mourn that loss.

IDONEA.

So deeply here
Man's spirit is infleshed ! Two moments are there
Wherein the soul of man beholds its God ;
The first at its creation, and the next
The instant after death.

THE EMPRESS.

It sees its Judge.

IDONEA.

And, seeing, is self-judged, and sees no longer :—
Yet rests in perfect peace. As some blind child,
Stayed in its mother's bosom, feels its safety,
So in the bosom of the love eterne,
Secure, though sad, that Vision it awaits
(The over-bending of that Face divine),
Which now—now first—it knows to be its heaven,
That primal thirst of souls at last re-waked,
The creature's yearning for its great Creator.

THE EMPRESS.

Pray that these pains may help me toward that Vision!
Till these my later years I feared not death :
Death's magnanimity, as death draws nigh,
Subdues that fear. My hope is in the Cross.
Whate'er before me lies, the eternal justice
Will send my pain, the eternal love console,
And He who made me be at last my peace.
Farewell! Return at morn; your words—your looks
Have brought me help. Be with me when I die.

SCENE II.—PALACE OF WOODSTOCK.

KING HENRY, JOHN OF OXFORD.

KING HENRY.

All 's well ; and then all 's ill ;—who wars on Becket
Hath January posting hard on May,
And night at ten o' the morn. That man regains
Whate'er is lost : he 's dangerous in retreat.
Three times I conquered ; first with rotten aid
Of his own bishops in this realm of England ;
At Rome through help of yours, when hope seemed
gone ;
Lastly at Montmirail. Now comes the change :
Those new-sent envoys o'er me bend their brows ;
Impeach me with bad faith ; aver the Censures
Conditionally only were removed ;
Remind me of your pledge at Rome ! Perforce
I sware to keep at least my later pledge,
Made where St. Denys died.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

If humbly thus
Your Highness pleads your right to wear that crown,
Bequest of kings who bowed not to the crosier,
The primate wins his own again ; the king

Partakes with Edward named the Confessor
Henceforth the saintly praise.

KING HENRY.

Bequest of kings !

There 's none of them that dared what I have dared !
They ruled a realm, and shared that realm with
priests :

I rule an empire : many a realm there died,
Died nobly to upbuild it ;—rule an empire
Which in the West shall one day vaster prove
Than Frederick's in the East. How bind, how fuse it,
If every bishop reigns, a lesser king,
And every baron ? To the dust with such !
My empire is an empire ruled by laws,
Not warring wills ; but, mark you, royal laws,
The efflux of one royal will, forth flowing
Like rivers through the land !

JOHN OF OXFORD.

There spake a king !

To speed that great design, I, priest myself,
For many a year, not caring who cried 'shame,'
Have given you help—that help a priest alone,
Sagacious through the labyrinth still to scent
The tortuous trail of priestcraft, could have given.

Sir, at this hour you stand in dangers worse
Thrice than your dangers past. A cry goes up,
Not from the poor alone. Your barons helped you
Craving Church plunder, not from loyal love :
To-day they fear you, and renounce your cause.
The Pope grows strong ; and with his strength his
courage ;
While Becket, sager for defeats foregone,
Comes hard on victory's goal.

KING HENRY.

A synod, John—
At Clarendon I 'll call it, in three months.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

The bishops will be wary. Synods now
Are perilous things ; the last was ill-attended.
Old Winton, summoned, answered that the canons
Forbad appeal from greater powers to less :
' And I,' he said, ' now old and grey, have had
That greater summons from my Master, God,
Whose judgment I await.'

KING HENRY.

Within your eye
I see a counsel glimmering. Speak it, John !

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Your Highness needs some measure stringent, strong,
Some act to daunt your foes, and cheer your
friends ;—

Yet, venturing such, before you imminent
An Interdict there looms.

KING HENRY.

And that were ruin.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Hear now my counsel ! Crown your son, Prince
Henry!

The boy will be your puppet-king ;—the world
Must count him king in act. Work then your will :
No Interdict strikes him, or his.

KING HENRY.

'T were hard—

To crown a king is Canterbury's right
By law and usage both.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

That stands provided !

You willed to crown the prince when eight years old :
That day the Pope granted a dispensation,
And bade you choose your bishop. Canterbury

Lacked then, 't is true, a primate. What of that?
A precedent was made ;—the rest be mine.
Send me to Rome : the Pope desires no triumph ;
Will soon believe that, grieved at errors past,
You from your greatness have deposed yourself
To fight in Holy Land.

KING HENRY.

The Pope consent !

JOHN OF OXFORD.

He still may count that dispensation binding :
If, pressed by Becket, he should call it back,
We act at once upon his earlier mandate,
And brand the last as forged. That last indeed,
Unless in public with the bishops lodged,
They well may treat as null.

KING HENRY.

Which fraud exposed,
Becket will launch his bolt.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

O, never, never
That bolt shall Becket launch——

KING HENRY.

I keep him barred

From England's shores. Not less that bolt would
scorch them.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

We have reached the inmost kernel of my scheme.
Some six weeks since—so rumour ran—you stood
All day in stormy conference with your bishops :
At eve a stranger, gliding through the dusk,
Lodged in your royal hand an unsigned letter,
On reading which you smiled.

KING HENRY.

Its words were these :

' Better that Becket stood on England's shores
Than roamed the world at will.'

JOHN OF OXFORD.

I wrote that letter.

KING HENRY.

Craftiest of counsellors, I see your drift !
You mean—a dungeon. Henry crowned, the pri-
mate,
Or wrathful, or to win his pupil back,
Will hasten to this land.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Your Highness then

Hunting in merry Maine ! A dungeon—yes—
Worse than a dungeon would be worse for us—

(QUEEN ELEANOR enters with her ladies.)

The glory and the grace of female beauty,
Consummate, and mature, and crowned a Queen !

QUEEN ELEANOR (*advancing to the king with a parrot
on her wrist.*)

Lo, here my new-taught mocker ! Learn like him !
Speak, painted prophet !—‘ Thomas is a fool ! ’

SCENE III.—A WOOD CLOSE TO THE ABBEY OF
ST. COLOMBE, NEAR SENS.

HERBERT OF BOSHAM, *alone.*

HERBERT.

If Nature, God’s fair daughter, wreathes at times
The Church’s fillet o’er her laughing eyes,
And, masked in livery of her graver sister,
Like her would teach us—learn we then her lore !
What means this flower ? Men call it Columbine ;
A tassel-toy. Yet, pluck, save one, its purples,
And lo, that remnant left puts on the dove !

Blossom to bird is changed ! The meaning 's plain :
Weed out your joys ; cast off redundancies :
And at their core you reach the winged greatness !
The passion-flower itself—

JOHN OF SALISBURY (*arriving*).

Hail, ancient friend !

HERBERT.

Far-travelled seer, welcome from all the lands !
How speak they of our primate ?

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Much, and ill :
The magnates of the State fear and dislike him ;
The magnates of the Church admire yet fear ;
With instinct from above the poor are with him.

HERBERT.

'T is ever thus ! In Castle Rockingham,
When like a stag at bay old Anselm stood,
The Red King glaring at him in lust of blood,
What help was his from prelate or from peer ?
The council-hall was as a captured city :
The bishops hung their heads. Then from the crowd
An old grey man stepped forth, and knelt, and said,
'Father, thy children bid thee have no fear :
The poor man's prayer is strong !'

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Not helpfuller then
 Pope Urban was to Anselm than, this hour,
 His successor to Thomas. Herbert, Herbert !
 The Church errs never ; but her rulers err :
 They lack the earth-wisdom of the secular lords.

HERBERT.

The errors of the rulers of the Church
 At times more serve her than their happiest prudence.
 'T is true they cause her trials :—well, what next ?
 God sends her strength proportioned to those trials,
 And makes her feel that strength is His alone.
 Statesmen do penance here on earth for errors ;—
 Their sins a later, sterner Court shall judge.
 The Church her sackcloth wears on earth for sins ;
 The sinless error hurts her not : it breeds
 Her pains of growth—no more.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

That slowness frets me.

HERBERT.

Her slowness means her greatness. Statesmen play
 Still the short game, because their time is short ;
 She that endures, the long. Her nature this ;

Her nature, and God's law, not her design :
Her total force she cannot mass in front :
Reserves she hath. Some tyrant's luckless craft
Forth drags them ; and, his victory all but won,
He finds his war beginning.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Henry's craft

Deceives no more. He offered Parma late
Two thousand marks for help of hers at Rome,
To Milan and Cremona paid three thousand :
No help they gave him. Gratian, when the king
Assailed him late with wrath, or wrath pretended,
Made answer, 'Cease from threats: we come from
one

Who gives, not takes the law.' Vivian spake thus :
'Much have I witnessed, wrestled oft with kings ;
But ne'er till now met I a wit as keen,
A faith as false as yours.'

HERBERT.

How answered Henry?

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Thus, with a smile : 'I act but as I must :
To win three kingdoms were an easier task
Than to contend with Becket !'

HERBERT.

God, O God !

How diverse showed those twain when first they
warred,
And how that first diversity hath grown
With fleeting of the years ! At Montmirail
That truth o'ershone me like a lightning flash !
Not then, as at Northampton, towered he up,
A terror to his foes. In patient sadness,
With neck a little bent and forward head,
Six hours he stood beneath that scourge of tongues :
He spake but this ; 'I swear to serve my king,
Saving the honour of the King of kings :
Who swears to more is Pagan and a slave.'
No boast he made of self. 'Mid storm and darkness
He clung to God as limpet to the rock ;—
He 's greater than he was : the grace of Orders
Within his soul makes increase.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

It were time

He sued the Pope once more.

HERBERT.

He never sues him,
Though loyalest of his sons. He trusts in God,

And broods not much on counsels for the future.
When late I spake of such, he smiled and said,
'There was an hour beside St. Denys' tomb !
'T was then you deemed our fortunes touched their
highest :
It is not, friend, from thrones of kings or popes
Issues man's hope, but from the martyr's grave.'

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Herbert, the fault is yours—your fault—your folly !
One day you 'll wreck us. Yes, the fault is yours !
Should Thomas catch from you——

HERBERT.

No word from me
Hath Thomas heard to fire the martyr's zeal.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Ever you praise man's life; yet ever muse
How, innocently, man may soonest leave it :
All which the moment needeth you ignore.
Herbert, see that which is !—you gaze for aye
On pictures in the air.

HERBERT.

Which they can see not

Who, dazzled, watch that merry house on fire,
A world in dotage hastening to its doom.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Am I a worldling?

HERBERT.

Nay, but half, good John ;
Worldling with heavenward aim.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Herbert, you know
As little of the world as of the flesh—
Of each not more, I ween, than of the Devil :
Let the world be.

HERBERT.

Things are there he knows best
Who knows them only slightly, and at distance.
Well, well, the world is fair—this day at least ;—
Aye, and the life of man is worth the living !
So deem that bannered choir of youths and maids :
Glad hearts sing there !

PEASANTS (*bass near singing*).

Hark, the Spring ! She calls
With a thousand voices ;
'Mid the echoing forest-halls
One great heart rejoices !

Hills where young lambs bound
Whiten o'er with daisies ;
Flag-flowers light the lower ground
Where the old steer grazes.

Meadows laugh, flower-gay ;
Every breeze that passes
Waves the seed-cloud's gleaming grey
O'er the greener grasses.

O thou Spring ! be strong,
Exquisite new-comer !
And the onset baffle long
Of advancing Summer !

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Herbert, farewell ! Within I seek the primate :
New treasons rise ; which, to forestall, the Pope
Sends mandates to my Lords of York and London.
The Swearer saw him late—that means a storm.

SCENE IV.—THE ABBEY OF ST. COLOMBE.

BECKET, *alone.*

BECKET.

Each day more clearly, like two mighty peaks
Of one veiled mountain, shine two truths before me.
My hope is not from England—that I learned

Deserted at Northampton : not from Rome—
That learned I when those legates, later missioned,
Cancelled my two years' work, and from me drove
A penitent realm, returning. Once again
At Montmirail I learned it. Be it so !
Twice was the victory from my hand down dashed
When all but won.
Immeasurably Rome helps me—needs she must—
Simply by being—merely by existence ;
Help me by act she cannot. She doth well :
To invoke her now were base. But thou, my country,
The on-rolling centuries, whose fateful hands
Shall bind the purple or the death-robe round thee,
Engrain their deep-dyed tissue here, and now :
Thy son am I, not less than Christian bishop :
Thy martyr, if God wills it, I would die.

(LLEWELLEN enters.)

These be the Papal mandates. Place them, friend,
Within their hands—the hands of York and London ;
But when the eyes of men are on them set :
Your labour else is vain.

LLEWELLEN.

It shall be done.

[*Departs.*

BECKET.

There should have been no need to send those mis-sives—

I must not think it. Once I was unjust.
The Holy Father sees as from a height ;
I fight but on the plain : my time is short,
And in it much to expiate. I must act.

(*After a pause.*)

I strove for justice, and my mother's honour ;
For these at first. Now know I that God's Truth
Is linked with these as close as body and soul.

SCENE V.—A CASTLE ON THE BORDERS OF WALES.

CORNWALL, LEICESTER.

LEICESTER.

From ill to worse ! I see it daily plainer :
The forehead seamed ; the vacillating thought ;—
There 's fever, and there 's feebleness in both :
Greatness goes from him.

CORNWALL.

And sterility

Blights the lean years. Long since King Henry
sware
That Scotland to his crown should pay her homage ;
Ireland revere his sway—nay, bless his laws.
Where stand we ? Still on borders bleak of Wales,
Bearded by bandit clans.

LEICESTER.

The cause is patent.

This strife has weaned his people from their king :
He dares not trust them. Chester—Arundel—
Frown when they name his name ; and Oxford smiles ;
Brands him an upstart—then forgets the theme.
Barons that starve, and disaffected priests,
On such alone securely he relies.
His Customs ! What were we, nobles of England,
If pledged to recognise as law and right
Casual concessions, filched or bought—if tried
In hostile courts, and not before our peers ?
Better be collared with the old Saxon ring ;
Wear name of Serf and Thrall !

CORNWALL.

A rumour spreads

That Henry crowns the prince as King of England.

LEICESTER.

The perils these this conflict draws upon him !

Eight years ago he flung that scheme aside.
Prince Henry crowned ! Good father-king, beware !
You light a fire that soon will reach your roof !
From this beginning wars on wars shall rise.
The prince is proud ; will scorn to reign, a puppet ;
Discord will spread : first sons against their sire,
Brother 'gainst brother next will dash in frenzy :
The inveterate habit, hate, will prey within ;
The wound, skinned o'er, break out again in blood
A river streaming on from reign to reign,
Till on the far, predestinate field at last
Plantagenet's great race makes shameful end,
While some large-fisted boor, or blear-eyed knave
Steals the dishonoured crown. If any Fury
Hates Henry's house, she fixed on it her eye
Then when this strife began.

CORNWALL.

I hate this Becket ;—
He is the Church's champion.

LEICESTER.

Salisbury's bishop
Hates him and fears him both ; yet says full oft
' Becket was fanatic never, though a Churchman :
High priest at heart had scarce been priest so late,

Nor worn so long the Chancellor's gown. He 's
dangerous

Neither as proud nor tortuous, but as simple,
And passionate for the honour of his charge :
Some mastiff old is he, that by the door
Of hut or house, alike, keeps honest watch ;—
The State, not Church, his charge——'

CORNWALL.

I serve the king ;—

My thought ends there.

LEICESTER.

Cornwall, I also serve him ;—
Would I had served him with less servile service :
Our course hath scarce been knightly, nay, scarce
Christian.

'T is late to change ; yet this I know—the path
Which John of Oxford points must end in shame.

SCENE VI.—ABBAY OF ST. COLOMBE, NEAR SENS.

BECKET, ARCHBISHOP OF SENS, HERBERT OF BOSHAM.

BECKET.

Your Grace is gloomier than there 's need, and show
Less than yourself therein.

ARCHBISHOP OF SENS.

Your king is sudden :

The tidings of his march and victory reach us
Like runners matched. That slender, sinewy frame,
That ardent eye, that swift on-striding step,
Yet graceful as a tiger's, foot descending
Silent but sure on the predestinate spot—
From signs like these looks forth the inward man.
Expect grave news ere long.

BECKET.

My lord, that bishop

Who crowns, in scorn of great Augustine's right,
An English king, stands excommunicate.
I deem these rumours idle things. The Pope,
To bar all danger, issued letters thrice,
First from Anagni, from the Lateran next,
And last from Alba, to our English bishops :
Needless I thought his care ; yet sent those letters
To England at his hest.

ARCHBISHOP OF SENS.

A whisper stirs

That instruments consenting to that deed,
The sigil of the Fisherman appended,
Were forged by John of Oxford. Others say

He won the Pope's consent—no doubt by fraud ;
His fraud exposed, that sanction was withdrawn ;
But to those instruments consent withdrawing
The English ports are closed.

BECKET.

My lord, fear nought !
Remember Montmirail ! There stood I sole :
The good French king—nay, Rome itself against me :
More late the Roman envoys saw the snare :
The King of France—I sought him out at Sens :
With head bent low in heaviness he sat :
I deemed myself once more an exiled man :
One moment, and he knelt before my feet ;
' You, you alone,' he cried, ' that day had eyes ;
Blind were we all ;—except that youthful prince,
Friend have you none in England.'

(*To LLEWELLEN, entering.*)

Ha, good scout !
How sped you on your way ?

LLEWELLEN.

My errand failed.

BECKET.

No fault of yours, good friend !

LLEWELLEN.

By night I landed,
And sped to London in a beggar's garb.
Day after day, in banquet hall and church,
I strove to reach my Lords of York and London ;
They knew the danger near, and stood on guard.
At last I sought my Lord of London's house :
Slowly the bishop crossed the court in prayer,
And, reading, cast at times a sidelong glance.
I knelt me down, and raised the Papal missive :
He deemed it some petition ; softly took it ;—
Ere long he learned the truth.

BECKET.

But not in public ?

LLEWELLEN.

The humbleness in his regard grew sour ;
Yet wroth he seemed not. ‘From the Pope—a man-
date !
Knowing the parchment forged, I read it not :
The Pope’s authentic mandate is with us.’
He spake, and tossed it from him, and passed by.
In rushed the prince with mummers, and I ’scaped ;
Else had my lot been hard.

BECKET.

What saw you next ?

LLEWELLEN.

At morn the king was knighted by his father,
And crowned at stroke of noon.

BECKET.

By whom ?

LLEWELLEN.

By one

Who little liked his office—Roger of York.

BECKET.

His time will come. The coronation oath
At least bears witness 'gainst the 'Royal Customs ;'
The prince made oath to guard the Church's free-
dom—

Pray God he guard it better than his sire !

LLEWELLEN.

That sentence from his oath was razed : the bishops
Who crowned him sware to keep the Royal Customs !

BECKET (*rising suddenly*).

The mask is off ! Thank God, 't is off for ever !

(*After a pause.*)

No more of that. Proceed ! What next befell ?

LLEWELLEN.

The rest was nought but jubilee and triumph,
Wine-fountains, pealing bells, the bon-fires' glare,
The tournament, and charging of the steeds
In the ordered lists. High up, o'er-canopied
By cloth of gold, resplendent sat the Queen ;
Her ladies round her in a silken haze,
Like the moon's halo round the moon, when night
On hills of Wales——

HERBERT.

Let be your hills of Wales—
The feast? You saw it?

LLEWELLEN.

Aye, in minstrel's garb :
The tables groaned with gold : I scorned the
pageant !
The Norman pirates, and the Saxon boors
Sat round and fed : I hated them alike,
The rival races, one in sin.

HERBERT.

Both kings
Were present ?

LLEWELLEN.

There a merry chance befell :

King Henry stood behind his son, and served.

Give thanks, young prince,' my Lord of York brake forth,

'For ne'er till now—' 'Is it strange,' the boy replied,
If by an earl's son a king's son is served?'
The great hall roared with laughter—high o'er all
His father's voice !

BECKET.

How like my youthful pupil !

God bless the child !

ARCHBISHOP OF SENS.

Grave tidings these, my lord !

BECKET.

My lord, you take me back from morn to night.

The coronation 's nought—we are hurt elsewhere.

That Oath to keep the Church in liberty,

That baptism vow of England Christian made,

That bridal pledge of England wed to Christ,

That sister link 'twixt her and Christendom,

Whose holy kingdoms weep henceforth her fall—

That oath, that vow, that pledge, that link all-blessèd,

The birthright of the nations ere their birth ;

The talisman which, 'mid their youthful struggles,

Charmed them from fate, and saved them from
themselves ;

Which still for suffering weakness found defence
In the great conscience of Humanity,
Impersonate in God's Church, and armed and mis-
sioned ;—

Lo, where that Oath is dashed aside, cast off
Unceremoniously as a shifted robe,
Or banquet-trencher changed, or rotted bandage
Foul from a wound, and flung into the filth !
This thing no comment bears : too grave it is
For wrath or further speech. I go to England.

SCENE VII.—THE ‘TRAITOR’S MEADOW,’ BETWEEN
VIEFNI AND FREITVAL.

LEICESTER, CORNWALL, *Barons, and Courtiers near them.*

LEICESTER.

This meeting of the primate and the kings
Shall bring the end.

CORNWALL.

For years I have not seen
Such health on Henry’s brow. That coronation,
Which raised the boy to monarch, changed not less
His father to a boy.

LEICESTER.

And yet that deed
Was questionable, or worse. Triumphant acts
Consummated at last and on the sudden,
Whether their nature evil be or good,
Are not alone achievement, but deliverance :
A load 's removed ; and, like a ship upspringing
Then when the o'er-blown mast is from it cut,
The spirit regains its port erect, and rushes,
Though maimed, before the storm. Conscience ex-
pelled
Is next in strength to conscience crowned a king :—
Which strength is his I know not.

CORNWALL.

This I know,
The change is good. He sleeps again at nights ;
Once more his foot is swift, his hand is steady,
His blood is flame : within his eye is light—
Not joy, yet like to joy.

LEICESTER.

But see, he comes !
The French king not. That 'kiss of peace,' withheld
From Becket, moves his spleen.

CORNWALL.

Right opposite,

Rides Becket ; at his left Earl Theobald,
And Sens' Archbishop at his right. Once more
I see him sweeping o'er thy plain, Toulouse,
In warlike pomp, and mirthful majesty,
Of England's chivalry the first !

LEICESTER.

The king
Makes speed to meet him, with uncovered head ;
And lo, with what a zeal he grasps his hand !
Now they embrace. Was that the kiss of peace ?

JOHN OF OXFORD (*joining them*).
Not so :—the king's horse swerved.

SCENE VIII.—THE ‘TRAITOR’S MEADOW,’ NEAR
FREITVAL.

KING HENRY, BECKET ; *the ARCHBISHOP OF SENS is
near.*

KING HENRY.

The unhappy, sour, and anger-venomed time,
By craft of others clouded and confused,
Hath drifted past us ; and once more shines out
The sky of earlier days. Papal ambitions
Drave in betwixt us, Thomas !

BECKET.

Sir, my King,
 Those cloudy days at times had better gleams ;
 Their summer promise, like a witch's gold,
 Still left me poorer.

KING HENRY.

Nay, not promises !
 Forward I ever was to speak my hopes ;
 Slow to pledge grace.

BECKET.

Beneath Montmartre you pledged it :
 The French king heard you, and my Lord of Sens,
 And many a French and English knight beside.
 I prayed for restitution of those lands
 From Canterbury torn. It pleased your Highness
 To grant that suit : yet till this hour that pledge
 Stands void and unredeemed.

KING HENRY.

This must be looked to.

BECKET.

I made another and a weightier suit :
 Those benefices dowered for God's high worship
 And temporal service of the poor of Christ,

By sacrilegious barons clutched and sold
To trencher priests, the Church's scourge and
scandal,
For these I made demand. It pleased your Highness
To pledge your word that rapine should surcease.
Sire, for two little months the plague was stayed ;
Then burst it forth anew.

KING HENRY.

They hid it from me.

BECKET.

The vacant abbeys, widowed bishoprics
Glut still the royal coffers.

KING HENRY.

Some, I think,
Have gained true shepherds late : the rest shall win
them.
I made delay fearing lest rash elections
Might vex the Church's peace.

BECKET.

To me and mine

Return was promised to our native land
Where rest the bones of them who went before us :
Your coasts are closed against us ; and my friends—

'Of hunger many, more of grief, have died
In alien lands, and sleep in nameless graves.

KING HENRY.

Now by the Saints of Anjou and of Maine,
England to you is open as this hand,
And hath been since that coronation-day
Which made your pupil king.

BECKET.

Your Highness touches
Our latest wrong. The see of Canterbury
Hath privilege sole to crown our English kings :
My Lord of York usurped that dignity,
Crowning your son.

KING HENRY.

The Conqueror's self was crowned
By York's Archbishop, not by holy Stigand,
Primate that day. My grandfather was crowned
By Hereford's bishop.

BECKET.

Stigand had not won
From Rome the pallium ; and the see was vacant :
Hereford's bishop served in Anselm's place,
An exile then for God. Anselm, returned.
Re-crowned the ill-crowned king.

KING HENRY.

By Anjou's Saints,
Your bishops snared me. Let them pay the forfeit !

BECKET.

My Lords of York and London are suspended :
May it please your Highness plainly to declare
If you confirm that sentence ?

KING HENRY.

I confirm it !

'T is three times ratified. I tell you, Thomas,
I 'll have the old times again. The princess scorned
Unction not yours : ere long your hands shall crown her,
Your hands re-crown my son.

BECKET.

Alas ! the grief
To win all rights, all but the best, the dearest !
You make no mention of the——

KING HENRY.

Name them not !
This day is festal : bring no cloud upon it !

BECKET.

O would that I had never heard them named,
Ne'er seen them blazoned——

KING HENRY.

Thomas, on English shores
All wrongs shall be made right.

BECKET.

A morn there was—
Your Highness then had scarce been three months
king—
When, in a window of your Woodstock palace,
(The Queen was singing 'mid the birds below),
We read some history of pagan days ;—
It pierced your heart : you started up : you cried,
' Thrice better were these pagans than your saints !
They loved their native land ! They set their eyes
On one small city—small, but yet their mother—
And died in its defence !'

KING HENRY.

Again I say it !

BECKET.

I answered thus—‘They knew the State alone :
They played at dim rehearsals, yet were true
To truth, then man's. They gazed with tearful eyes,
Not on their city only, but that rock,
Its marble mother, which above it soared,
Crowned with that city's fortress and its fanes.

Beyond their gods lived on the “God Unknown :”
Above base mart and popular shout survived
The majesty of law.’

KING HENRY.

’T is true. Thus spake you.

BECKET.

But added this :—‘Our God is not unknown :
In omnipresent majesty among us
His Church sits high upon her rock tower-crowned,
Fortress of Law divine, and Truth Revealed,
O’er every city throned, o’er every realm !
Had we the man-heart of the men of old,
With what a spirit of might invincible
For her should we not die !’

KING HENRY.

With tears you spake it.

BECKET.

Then judge me justly, O my King, my friend,
Casting far from you, like a sundered chain,
A thought abhorred, an ignominy down-trodden,
The oppression of dead error. Say, shall I,
A Christian bishop, and a subject sworn,
Be pagan more than pagan, doubly false—

False to a heavenly kingdom throned o'er earth,
False to an earthly kingdom raised to heaven,
And ministering there, high on the mount of God,
'Mid those handmaiden daughters of a King
Who gird the Queen gold-vested ? Pagans, sire,
Lived not, though dark, in Babylonian blindness :
The laws of that fair city which they loved
Subjecting each man, raised him and illumed.
We too are citizens of no mean City :
Her laws look forth on us from rite and creed :
In her the race of Man Redeemed we honour,
Which—cleansed from bestial, and ill spirits ex-
pelled—
In unity looks down on us, God's Church,
The Bride of Christ, beside the great King throned,
Who on His sceptre leans. My King, my friend !
I have done to you no wrong ! My many sins
Lay other where. Tenfold their compt would rise,
If, sane myself, I pandered to your madness.

KING HENRY.

Thomas, you lack what only might convert me :—
Could you be England's King, her primate I,
Your part I too would play !

BECKET.

And O how nobly

And unlike me in fashion you would play it !
How petty my discourse hath been till now :—
Sir, see these things as you will one day see them !
Two lots God places in the hand of each :
We choose ; and oft we choose the lot least loved.
The youth who slays life's hope in blind excess
Knows not that deep within his heart—far deeper
Than all base cravings—those affections live
Which sanctified his father's home. Years pass :
Sad memories haunt the old man in his house,
Sad shadows strike the never-lighted hearth,
Sad echoes shake the child-untrodden floors :
A great cry issues from his famished heart—
' I spurned the lot I loved.'

KING HENRY.

My youth is past :
It had its errors ; yet within my house
Are voices young and sweet.

BECKET.

God keep them such !
Far better silence, and the lonely hall,
Than war-cries round the hearth. God guard your
children !
If you have risen against the Church, your mother,
God guard them from revolt against their sire !

I spake not, sir, of errors in your youth :
A parable was mine.
The soul's revolt is deadlier than the body's :
Sir, that revolt is pride. In time, beware !
That God who shapes us all to glorious end
For you ordained a glory beyond glory :
Spurn not true greatness for a phantom greatness !
Your flatterers are your danger : them you trust :
You fear the Church : to her you owe your all :
From her you gat your crown.

KING HENRY.

That word is true :
The Church and Theobald, and you not less,
Propped me at need. What then? A king, per-
force,
Reveres the ancient ways.

BECKET.

O never in you
Was tender reverence for the ancient ways !
Another mind is yours ; a different will,
An adverse aim ;—that aim I deem not base :
There 's greatness in it ; but your means are ruthless.
You love your children—there 's your sum of love ;
Yours are the passions which torment our clay,
The intellect and the courage which exalt it,

The clear conception of a state and empire—
Yet seen but from below. To raise that state
You crush all ancient wont, all rights and heights :
Your kingdom you would level to a plain,
O'erlooked by one hill only, and, thereon
The royal tent.

KING HENRY.

God made my heart ambitious.

BECKET.

Then be ambitious with a high ambition !
You scorn the lofty daring. Lions nigh,
You hunt the forest vermin.

KING HENRY.

Thomas, Thomas !

We kings should tender more our country's peace
Than any personal greatness.

BECKET.

Royal sir,

Play not the sophist with yourself or God.
You—you alone have marred your country's peace,
Sapping her faith ! Faith is a nation's safety.
Remember, sir, the 'Battle of the Standard !'
The Scotch king, David, harried all the North :

No king against him marched : 't was mitred Thurlston :

The freemen of the people round him flocked :

High in a chariot central 'mid that host

Hung the great banners of four English Saints

(Not Saints, Lord King, of Anjou or of Maine),

Cuthbert of Durham, John of Beverley,

Wilfred of Ripon, Peter named of York.

The cry of Albin swept the world before it !

Alone that chariot, with its banners, stood :

Back fell the astonished clans, and Carlisle's towers

Heard their last wail.

KING HENRY.

Barbaric days, my friend !—

Turn we to nearer themes. You deem me false,

I know, to friendship old. Impute that fault

To friendship's self. I looked to you for help :

I found my friend my foe.

BECKET.

I ne'er deceived you :

I taught you from the first the Church's rights,

Therein through zeal offending your great mother,

Who sleeps in God, and moving oft your spleen !

Taught you that nations were not ravening beasts,

Each with its separate spoil and will unquestioned,
But sisters in the bond of Christendom.
I told you pagan nations knew two laws,
Domestic—civil ; Christian nations three,
Domestic, civil, apostolical ;
(Man, that begins a family, through grace
Dilating to the family of Christ,
His utmost limit, and his nature's crown) ;—
Three spheres engird man's life : I said that none
Might wrong the lesser, none affront the greater :
You knew my heart; from first to last you knew it :
You thought the world would change it ; for which
cause
You willed me primate.

KING HENRY.

Aye, and curse that madness !
I spurn alike your parables and sermons :
I rule my land alone ! No more of this !

(After a pause.)

The tempest swept athwart me ;—it is past.
Thomas, we 're friends. Ere long we meet in Eng-
land :
There you shall have your fill of rights restored :
There, 'mid your frowning foes, the kiss of peace,

That knightly and that kingly pledge of love,
Which whoso violates thenceforth is base,
Shall seal our meeting. Louis more than once
For you that pledge demanded. What remains
Claim from my son.

BECKET.

Sire, ere a king's permission
Had made between a bishop and his see
Plain way once more, your coasts still armed against
me
As citizens guard their house by night from thieves,
My course was taken and announced :—return
Once more to my great charge.

KING HENRY.

A festive nation
Shall meet you landing there.

BECKET.

The first, de Broc !
He graces, ten long years, Saltwood, my manor,
And swears that ere this throat has swallowed down
Two English loaves, his knife shall round it wind !
Your pardon, sire ; your wandering eye denotes
Your thoughts elsewhere.

KING HENRY.

I sought a man I trust :

Would I could send my Lords of Sens and Rouen
To adorn your glad return ! I need them both:
Not less a worthy guide shall grace your way,
My friend—a scholar noted—John of Oxford.

BECKET.

I know him ; and I trust him not. Whoe'er
Your Highness wills is free to share my journey.
I see what I foresaw, and see the end.

KING HENRY.

Farewell, my lord : we meet ere long in England !

BECKET.

Farewell ! I think we shall not meet in England,
And therefore bless you, sire, in France, and now.

KING HENRY.

Not meet ?

BECKET.

I go to England, sire, to die.

KING HENRY.

Am I a traitor, Thomas ?

BECKET (*after a pause*).

Sire, not so.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—GISORS.

JOHN OF OXFORD, *and a priest.*

JOHN OF OXFORD.

This to my Lord of London. Make good haste !
Ride day and night ! This to my Lord of York :
From every town and hamlet send the tidings
That peace is made, and Becket reconciled,
The Pope contented well, the realm of France
Unanimous in joy.

PRIEST.

It shall be done.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Return at once. All letters for the king
Bring straight to me : I am his secretary.
The journey 's costly:—take my purse. Good speed !

SCENE II.—WYTSAND, ON THE COAST OF BOULOGNE.

BECKET, JOHN OF SALISBURY, HERBERT OF BOSHAM,
attendants.

BECKET (*standing apart from the rest*).

The night comes swiftly like a hunted man
Who cloaks his sin. The sea grows black beneath it ;
There 's not a crest that thunders on these sands
But sounds some seaman's knell.

The wan spume, racing o'er the death-hued waters,
This way and that way writhes a bickering lip :
As many winds as waves o'er-rush the deep,
Warring like fiends whose life is hate. Alas !
For him, the ship-boy on the drowning deck !
Heart-sickness and the weariness of life
He never felt : he knew nor sin nor sorrow—
Not thus I hoped to face my native land.

What means this sinking strange ? Till now my worst
Was when I saw my sister in her shroud.
Death, when it comes, will not be stern as this :
Death is the least of that which lies before me.
This is mine hour of darkness, and ill powers
Usurp upon my manlier faculties,
Which in the void within me faint and fail,

Like stones that loosen in some high-built arch
 Whereof the key-stone crumbles—
 I cannot stamp my foot upon the earth.
 Where art thou, Power Divine, my hope till now?
 To what obscure and unimagined bourne
 Beyond the infinitudes of measureless distance
 Hast thou withdrawn thyself? This, this remains;
 Seeing no more God's glory on my path,
 To tread it still as blindfold innocence
 Walks 'twixt the burning shares.

JOHN OF SALISBURY (*joining Becket*).

Beware, my lord! I know King Henry's eye:
 Go not to England. He would have you there
 Who drove you thence long since.

BECKET.

Our ends are diverse;
 Not less my way may lie with his.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

How far?

BECKET.

It may be to my church of Canterbury;
 It may be to the northern transept there;
 It may be to that site I honoured ever,

The altar of St. Benedict. Thus far
Our paths may blend—then part.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Go not to England !

I mingled with the sailors of yon ship :
Their captain signed to me : then, with both hands
Laid on my shoulders, and wide, staring eyes,
Thus whispered :— ‘ Lost ! undone ! Seek ye your
deaths ?
All men may land in England—none return.’

BECKET.

Behold, I give you warning in good time,
Lest anger one day pass the bounds of truth :
King Henry never schemed to shed my blood :
Dungeons low-vaulted, and a life-long chain ;—
That was the royal dream. Return, my friend ;
You know your task.

[*John of Salisbury departs.*

Thank God, that cloud above my spirit clears !
Danger, when near, hath still a trumpet’s sound :
It may be that I have not lived in vain ;
Let me stand once within the young king’s presence,
And though the traitors should besiege him round,
Close as the birds yon rock——

ARCHBISHOP OF SENS (*arriving*).

My lord, God save you !

BECKET.

One kind act more—you come to say farewell.
 My brother, and my lord, four years rush back
 And choke my heart ! We are both too old for
 weeping.

I am a shade that fleets. May centuries bless
 That house so long my home !

ARCHBISHOP.

The see of Sens

Has had you for her guest ;—our fair cathedral
 And yours are sisters :—be the omen blest !
 Perhaps in future ages men may say,
 ‘ Thomas of Canterbury, Sens’ poor William—
 These men, so far apart in gifts of grace,
 Were one in mutual love.’

BECKET.

My lord, in heaven
 Not earth alone, that love shall be remembered.
 Bear back my homage to your good French king,
 That great and joyous Christian gentleman,
 Who keeps in age his youth. In strength he walks
 The royal road— faith, hope, and charity,

To throne more royal and a lordlier kingdom.
Pray him to live with Henry from this hour
In peace.

ARCHBISHOP.

The king will ask of your intents.

BECKET.

Tell him we play at heads. God rules o'er all.
Farewell!

ARCHBISHOP.

Good friend, and gracious lord, farewell !

[*The Archbishop of Sens departs, attended.*

HERBERT OF BOSHAM.

As good to go to heaven by sea as land !
Sail we, my lord, this evening ?

BECKET.

Herbert, Herbert !

Before thou hast trod in England forty days,
All that thou hast right gladly would'st thou give
To stand where now we stand. What sable shape
Is that which sits on yonder rock, alone,
Nor heeds the wild sea-spray ?

HERBERT.

My lord, Idonea ;

She too makes way to England, and desires
Humbly your Grace's audience.

BECKET.

Lead her hither.

[*Herbert departs.*

Herbert and John—both gone—how few are like them!
God made me rich in friends. In Herbert still,
So holy and so infant-like his soul,
I found a mountain-spring of Christian love
Upbursting through the rock of fixed resolve—
A spring of healing strength ; in John, a mind
That, keener than diplomatists of kings,
Was crafty only 'gainst the wiles of craft,
And, stored with this world's wisdom, scorned to use it
Except for virtue's needs.
The end draws nigh. Nor John nor Herbert sees it.

(*His attendants approach with IDONEA.*)

Earth's tenderest spirit and bravest ! Welcome, child !
Soft plant in bitter blast ! Adieu, my friends ;
This maid hath tidings for my private ear.

[*The attendants depart.*

My message reached you then, my child, at Rouen ?
But what is this ? Is that the countenance turned
So long to yon dark West ?



IDONEA.

Love reigns o'er all!—

My father, who but you should hear the tale?
I had forsaken that fair Norman home,
To seek my English convent, and those shores
Denied me long. The first night of my journey
There came to me a vision. All alone
I roamed, methought, some forest lion-thronged,
And dinned all night by breakers of a sea,
Booming far off. In fear I raised my head:—
T'ward me there moved two Forms, female in garb,
In stature and in aspect more than human:
The loftier wore a veil.

BECKET.

You knew the other?

IDONEA.

The Empress! In that face, so sad of old,
Was sadness more unlike that former sadness
Than earthly joy could be. Within it, lived
A peace to earth unknown, and, with that peace,
The hope serene of one whose heaven is sure.
She placed within my hand a shining robe,
And spake:—‘For him whom most thou lov'st on
earth:’—
It was a shroud.

BECKET.

A shroud?

IDONEA.

And other none

Than that which, 'mid the snows of Pontigny,
 Enswathed your sister, as in death she lay
 Amid the waxlight sheen. It bore that cross
 traced in sanguine silk before the burial.

This is, my lord, men say, your day of triumph,
 Christ's foes subjected, and His rights restored ;
 Doubtless long years of greatness lie before you :
 Perhaps for that cause she, an Empress once,
 Knowing that triumph is our chief of dangers,
 Sent you that holy warning.

BECKET.

I accept it.

Spake not that other?

IDONEA.

Suddenly a glory

Forth burst that lit huge trunk, and gloomiest cave :
 That queenlier Presence had upraised her veil.

BECKET.

You knew her face?

IDONEA.

And learned what man shall be
When risen to incorrupt. It was your sister !

BECKET.

Great God ! I guessed it.

IDONEA.

In her hand she held
A crown whose radiance quenched the heavenly signs ;
The star-crown of the elect who bore the Cross.
With act benign within my hand she placed it,
And spake :—‘ For him thou lov’st the most on earth.’
It was her being spake—her total being—
Body and spirit, not her lips alone.
I heard : I saw. That vision by degrees
Ceased from before me ;—long the light remained :
A cloudless sun was rising, pale and dim,
In that great glory lost.

BECKET.

My daughter, tell me——

IDONEA.

This storm is nothing ; nor a world in storm !
The rage of nations, and the wrath of kings !
God sits above the roaring water-floods :

He in our petty tumults hath His peace,
And we our peace in His. Man's life is good ;
Death better far.

BECKET.

Was this a dream or vision ?

IDONEA.

A vision, and from God.

BECKET.

Both dream and vision
Have been His heralds oft —

IDONEA.

To make us strong
In duteous tasks, not lull the soul, or soften.
That vision past, tenfold in me there burned
The craving once again to tread our England,
Where fiercest is the battle of the faith.
Thither this night I sail.

BECKET.

In three days I.
Ere then a perilous task must be discharged :
The Pope hath passed the sentence of suspension
On two schismatic bishops, London and York.
See you these parchments with the leaded seals ?

They must be lodged within the offenders' hands—
Chiefly the hands of York—and lodged moreover
While witnesses are by. Llewellen failed :
If this time he succeeds, and yet is captured,
Send tidings in his place.

IDONEA.

Llewellen 's known ;
Was late in England ;—all your friends are known.
Those prelates both are now, I think, in London :
On Sunday morning this poor hand of mine
Shall lodge that sentence, aye, and hold it fast,
Within the hand of York.

BECKET.

The danger 's great :
The habit of a nun might lull suspicion :
Not less, the deed accomplished——

IDONEA.

Can they find
Dungeon so deep that God will not be there,
And those twain memories which beside me move,
My soul's defence, a mother's and a brother's ?
Or death ? One fears to die, for life is sin :
One fears not death. Your sister 'mid the snows
Upon this bosom died : she feared not death ;

While breath remained she thanked her God, and
praised Him.

The Empress on this bosom died ;—death near,
She was most humbly sad, most sweetly fearful ;
But, closer as it drew, her hope rose high,
And all was peace at last.

BECKET.

Then go, my child,
You claim a great prize—meet it is you find it.
May He who made, protect you ! May His saints,
Fair-flowering and full-fruited in His beam,
Sustain you with their prayers ; His angel host
In puissance waft you to your earthly bourne,
In splendour to your heavenly. Earth, I think,
Hath many a destined work for that small hand ;—
Sigh not as yet for heaven !

IDONEA.

I will not, father :
I wait His time.

BECKET.

The wind has changed to south ;
The sea grows smoother, and a crimson light
Shines on the sobbing sands. Beyond the cliff
The sun sets red. This is the mandate, child ;
Farewell, and pray for me !

[*Idonea kneels, kisses his hand, and departs.*

HERBERT (*returning with the rest*).

Bad rumours thicken——

BECKET.

In three days hence I tread my native shores.

LLEWELLEN.

With what intent?

BECKET.

To stamp this foot of mine
Upon the bosom of a waiting grave,
And wake a slumbering realm.

LLEWELLEN.

May it please your Grace——

BECKET.

My friends, seven years of exile are enough :
If into that fair church I served of old
I may not entrance make, a living man,
Let them who loved me o'er its threshold lift
And lay my body dead.

SCENE III.—SEA-SHORE AT DOVER.

THE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK, THE BISHOPS OF LONDON
AND OF SALISBURY.

GILBERT.

The boors at Sandwich, as his ship drew near,
Noting the great cross archiepiscopal,
Met him breast high in the waves.

JOCELINE OF SALISBURY.

The women hailed him
The orphan's father, and the widow's judge :
From Sandwich to the gates of Canterbury
The concourse, as he passed them, knelt, and sang
'Blessed is he who cometh in God's name !'

GILBERT.

De Broc and our retainers, as he landed,
Drew near, their armour hidden 'neath their vests,
Protesting with fierce brows against our wrong.
Becket thus answered : 'With your king's consent—
Two hundred men together heard him speak it—
The Pope suspends those bishops for their sin.'
If Henry yields, all 's lost.

ROGER.

The king's consent !

'T was he who bade us crown the prince his son !

GILBERT.

The game is played, and lost. The cards were with us—
A king magnanimous, and an angry queen,
Foe of our foe ; an emperor whose sword
Warred on the crosier ; and an antipope ;
The nobles with us, and the people cowed.
These things were for us ;—what was there against us ?
One man—one man alone ; not trained in schools ;
No canonist ; with scant ascetic fame ;
A man once worldly warred on by the world.
My lords, this man, subduing his own heats,
And learning how to wait, hath to himself
Well nigh subdued the realm. No course remains,
This day, except to yield.

JOCELINE.

We had these helps ;

But policy had none.

ROGER.

My lord, we had one :

A day ere Becket landed all was marred.
I at St. Paul's had sung that morn the mass :

The king was standing with his courtiers round him ;
Then drew to me a nun in black, and knelt :
She raised, in humble sort, a scroll. I took it.
She closed my hand in both of hers, and cried,
'A mandate from the Pope, with his command
To read the same aloud.' The papal seal—
The Fisherman's—witnessed that scroll authentic :
Perforce I read it. 'T was my own suspension !

JOCELINE.

The nun ?

ROGER.

Through folly of the king she 'scaped :
The boy but laughed ; then sent her to her convent,
Therein to plot and pray.

JOCELINE.

Her name ?

DE BROD (*who has just ridden up*).

Idonea !

The accursèd veil hid not the hand ! I knew it.
Long since I told her it should dig a grave.
From John of Oxford this ! he landed late
At Sandwich with the traitor.

ROGER.

Sir, I thank you.

(Reads.)

'The king has given consent to those suspensions,
And stands impledged to fill the vacant sees.
Wring, from this darkness, dawn ! At once—un-
bidden—
In over-measure crown his six years' suit.
Send him six canons from each vacant see :
Let these elect the bishop he shall choose,
In his own chapel, yea, in his own presence ;—
The royal heart will then be wholly yours :
Make speed across the seas.'

GILBERT.

At once—we must :
I much misdoubt this youthful king.

DE BROC.

Attend :
Where'er the traitor moves I hem him round
With horsemen fierce and free. Without a guard
He dares not move. Now mark ! A guard 's an army !
A larger army is that rabble-rout
Which dogs his steps. Scare the young king with
rumours ;
Wound his self-love ; tell him the primate 's sworn
To abase a prince ill crowned.

GILBERT.

And be he warned,
Becket in London, to deny him access ;
His failure known, the people's zeal will slack,
And wild tales rush abroad.

DE BROC.

The self-same rumours
Shall fire the father-king.

ROGER.

A sager counsel—

DE BROC.

Sage heads and keen of England, and of France,
That think ye see so far, I tell you this,
Within the hollow heart of all your sageness
A blind worm works ! Farewell ! Ere long you 'll
cry,
'The strong hand of de Broc was worth us all.'

(*He gallops away. The rest, except GILBERT OF LONDON,*)
walk rapidly towards the harbour.)

GILBERT (alone).

Somewhere—I know not when—I know not how—
I took, methinks, one step—one little step—

A hair's breadth only from the righteous way.
Where will this end? I know not. This I know,
A man there is I hate—his name is Becket.

SCENE IV.—THE GREAT HALL OF THE PALACE
OF BUR, NEAR BAYEUX.

In parts of the hall tables are spread; in other parts the guests converse. At the higher end stand two thrones, on one of which QUEEN ELEANOR sits. CORNWALL, LEICESTER, the BISHOP OF LISIEUX, DE TRACY, DE MOREVILLE, BRITO, courtiers, ladies, guests, and minstrels.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

Be merry, lords; we keep our birthday feast:
The loneliest spots, and wildest, of our realm,
London and Worcester's self, we will to share
This day the general joy.

COURTIERS.

God save the Queen!

CORNWALL (*to Leicester*).

Five weeks that splendour strengthened on his brow;
Revolted feudatories made submission;
Flanders and France were leagued with him in love:

Then once again that inward grief returned ;
New nightmares vexed his bed.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

Set forth a dance !

LEICESTER (*to Cornwall*).

Sir, the heart hardening maketh soft the brain :
He is not what he was. Of old, when wrath
Hurled forth its fiercest flame, his mind, not less
Rushed up keen-edged within it and above it,
A spear's length higher ;—higher yet his will.
To-day his angers drag aside his purpose.
He hath done his own soul wrong.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

Minstrels, ye sleep !

(*The KING enters with JOHN OF OXFORD ; they converse apart
in a window.*)

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Nay, those were heated moods ;—his native airs
Dissolve that frosty caution exiled taught him :
He said, ‘ My lords of Rouen and of Sens
Save for that king had brought me home in honour.’
He plots ; but plots not war.

KING HENRY.

What meant those letters ?

JOHN OF OXFORD.

His knave that blabbed his secret knew not that :
One was for Scotland's king, and four, he thought,
For princes rebel late in Wales ; the rest
For earls in England malcontent.

KING HENRY.

He dares not.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

Doubtless he dares not ; and that popular zeal
Which hailed him landing, was but madness old.
He plays a deeper game than treason.

KING HENRY.

Ha !

JOHN OF OXFORD.

The realm invaded, or those earls in arms,
He blows the Church's trumpet,—marches to London ;
Commends himself deliverer of the king ;
Recovers straight his pupil's childish love,
Or mildly, else, inthralls him.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

Flavel, sing !

I dance no more.

LISIEUX (*to Leicester*).

Her Highness is not pleased :
 The man she hates hath triumphed. Year by year
 She urged his Highness 'gainst my lord the primate ;
 Of late she whets him with more complicate craft :
 She knows that all she likes the king dislikes,
 And feigns a laughing, new-born zeal for Becket,
 To sting the royal spleen.

KING HENRY (*to John of Oxford*).

He never should have trod these English shores.

JOHN OF OXFORD.

As freeman, never ;—said I not as much ?
 The young king's council should have found those
 letters ;
 Tested their authenticity ; consigned
 Their writer to a prison. Please it, your Highness,
 'T is not too late. My Lord Justiciary
 Stands by the council's side.

KING HENRY.

I dare not, John ;
 His death, though death by chance, would wrong my
 heart—

Imprisonment itself requires pretext.

There are that watch us : mingle with the crowd.

[*John of Oxford departs.*

THE QUEEN.

What doth our gracious liege so long in exile ?
We languish in his absence, like poor vines
Here in this sunless North. He plots, no doubt,
With John of Oxford 'gainst our first of men,
My lord the primate. Once I loathed that man :—
The more fool I ! If women he contemns,
Man-like he fought his battle, and hath won it :
The man that wins should wear ! I ever cry,
'Let him win all !'

(*The KING approaches and sits on a chair not far from the QUEEN's throne.*)

Welcome, good king and husband !
I praise your friend ! From England forth he fled
A debtor and a bankrupt. He returns
A Legate, trampling down your royal bishops ;—
I say, let him have all !

KING HENRY.

Our queen is mirthful.

QUEEN ELEANOR.

When Becket rose, a man was England's king :

Finding such charge too-onerous for such manhood
 He slipped his burthen, and a boy sits throned ;
 Wears a straw crown. Becket is king in substance ;
 Why not in name? Though secular kings, when saints,
 Have spurned that siren, Power, he need not fear her :
 Yon bird finds food in weeds poison to us,
 And Becket, meekly wearing crowns of earth,
 Shall merit heaven's the more.

KING HENRY.

The queen goes mad!

QUEEN ELEANOR.

Our southern realm remains. That sunnier half
 Outweighs the whole ;—and yet not thus you deemed,
 Husband, that time when, Stephen dead, you sued
 Your wife's good aid. I made you King of England !
 My strong Provençal fleet o'erawed that day
 Your English barons ; barred them from allies :
 That hour the work was mine ; the jest was yours :
 You thought it laughter-worth. My turn comes next !
 Ye that have goblets, brim them ! Mark this cup :
 It flames with Albi's wine !

(QUEEN ELEANOR rises and stands on the highest step of the
 throne with a golden cup in her right hand.)

LEICESTER (*to Lisieux*).

Behold her, Lisieux !

That smile is baleful as a winter beam
Streaking some cliff wreck-gorged ;—her hair and eyes
Send forth a glare half sunshine and half lightning——

QUEEN ELEANOR.

A toast, my lords ! the London merchant's son,
Once England's primate—henceforth King of Eng-
land !

KING HENRY (*leaping to his feet and half drawing his sword*).

Woman, be silent !

FITZ-URSE (*entering*).

May it please your Highness,
My lords of York, London, and Salisbury
Are come from England, charged with news not
good :
My lord of London, worn, and somewhat faint,
Rests by the gate.

KING HENRY.

Command them to the presence.

(*The ARCHBISHOP OF YORK and the BISHOP OF SALISBURY enter, followed by GILBERT OF LONDON, who leans on JOHN OF OXFORD.*)

SCENE V.—THE PORCH OF CANTERBURY
CATHEDRAL.HERBERT OF BOSHAM, JOHN OF SALISBURY; *near them attendants, waiting the arrival of BECKET.*

HERBERT.

Here stood we on his consecration feast.
The long years dragged : to-day they seem but weeks,
A dove-flight of white weeks through vernal air.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Herbert, you jar me with your ceaseless triumphs,
And hope 'gainst hope. You are like a gold leaf
dropped
From groves immortal of the Church triumphant
To mock our Church in storm ! For manners' sake
I pray you, chafe at times. The floods are out !
I say the floods are out ! This way and that
They come a-sweeping.

HERBERT.

Wheresoe'er they sweep
The eye of God pursues them, and controls :
That which they are to Him, that only *are* they :
The rest is pictured storm.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

How sped your journey?

HERBERT.

From first to last de Broc with wrong assailed us ;
But on us, like a passionate south wind, blew
The greetings of the loyal and the just.
Two days we rode. London's old tower in sight,
We met the citizens ; for miles forth streamed they
To meet *their* citizen—for so they hailed him.
The poor came first ; then merchants and their wives ;
Next, clad in gold, the mayor and aldermen ;
And, lastly, priests intoning Benedictus
Scarce heard amid the pealing of the bells.
On London Bridge the houses at each side
Hung tapestries forth, their roofs o'erswarmed with
gazers ;
The ships all purpled by those flags that still
Painted the crystal bosom of the Thames—
More swayed by popular ecstasies, so seemed it,
Than shiftings of the wind.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

How looked our Thomas ?

HERBERT.

Passing, he gave the blessing with still smile.

One time he laughed : 't was when a crazy beldam
Cried from the crowd, ' Beware the knife, Arch-
bishop ! '

Sighed once—'t was when he passed his parents' door,
Flower-garlanded ; the gayest in Cheapside.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Where lodged he ?

HERBERT.

At my Lord of Winton's palace.

At eve he paced the gardens, by his side
St. Alban's abbot, Simon. I was near:
I marked him draw the right hand of the abbot
Within his robe ;—then heard, ' My friend, my friend,
Things are not what they seem ! '

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Saw he his pupil ?

HERBERT.

At ten next morning Joceline of Louvaine
Sent by that pupil rudely sought the primate :
The boy-king bade him back to Canterbury !
' Shall I not barely see the royal face ? '
Thus answered he—no more. If ever grief
Cast shadow on man's face, I saw it then.
He sat till noon had struck ; then bade to horse.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Your homeward way was hardest?

HERBERT.

Hardest thrice.

The news had gone abroad, and many shunned us ;
Aggression hourly wore a fiercer front ;
More contumelious brows were on us bent :
Here lay the bridge a ruin ; shafts assailed us ;
The dyke was cut ; the road in water drowned.
We heard, one time, the spleenful horn of knaves
That hunted in his Grace's manors. Friend,
You have had my tale.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Mine will not bring you comfort.

Go where I might, except among the poor,
'T was all one huge conspiracy of error,
Conspiracy, and yet unconscious half :
For, though, beneath, there worked one plastic mind,
The surface seemed fortuitous concurrence,
One man the hook supplying, one the eye,
Here the false maxim, there the fact suborned,
This the mad hope, and that the grudge forgotten.
The lawyer wrote the falsehood in the dust
Of mouldering scrolls ; with sighs the Court-priest
owned it ;

The minstrel tossed it gaily from his strings ;
 The witling lisped it, and the soldier mouthed it.
 These lies are thick as dust in March——

HERBERT.

Which galls us,

Yet fruitful makes, perforce, the sufferers' fields.
 Patience, good friend !

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

I found, on my return,
 A swift, I fear a fatal growth of mischief.
 The coasts are guarded : three days since the forts
 Of Dover, Rochester, and Bletchinglee
 Received a force : the castles near the shore
 Bristle with arms. Spies walk among the people :
 De Broc spurs madly o'er the flat sea-sands,
 Wine-flushed, or wan with watching ; oft he flings
 A mailed hand far back, and cries, ‘ So long
 As honest steel can carve a wholesome dish
 No priest shall bid me starve.’

HERBERT OF BOSHAM.

Hark, hark, a hymn !

St. Stephen's feast comes soon. The good choir-master

Rehearses some sweet anthem in his praise.
There's not a saint in heaven dearer to Thomas!

The Hymn.

Princes sat, and spake against me,
Sinners held me in their net :
Thou, O Lord, wilt save Thy servant,
For on Thee his heart is set.
Strong is he whose strength Thou art :
Plain his speech, and strong his heart.

SCAILMAN (*coming up rapidly*).

The royal troops make way through the south gate :
Richard de Humet sent them—he who left
The king at Bayeux late.

The Hymn.

Gathered on a thousand foreheads
Dark and darker grew the frown,
Broadening like the pine-wood's shadow
While the wintry sun goes down ;
On the saint that darkness fell—
At last they spake ;—it was his knell.

As a maid her face uplifteth,
Brightening with an inward light,
When the voice of her beloved
Calls her from a neighbouring height,
Stephen raised his face on high,
And saw his Saviour in the sky.

A MAN IN A MASK (*detaching himself from the crowd and joining them*).

Flee while ye may!—the primate helped me once :
Unless he 'scape to-night, he sees not Tuesday.

[*Rejoins the revellers.*]

The Hymn.

Dimm'd a moment was that vision ;
O'er him burst the stony shower :
Stephen, with his arms extended,
For his murderers prayed that hour :
To his prayer St. Paul was given ;
Then he slept, and woke in heaven.

(BECKET approaches at the head of a procession.)

HERBERT.

Lo, the procession comes !

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

The primate walks
As one that died, and rose, and dies no more.

HERBERT.

I note in him one strength the world detects not :
The Church for others hath seven sacraments ;
For him she keeps an eighth—the poor of Christ !
Lo there ! As often as he gives them alms
He lays on them his hands.

JOHN.

As one that loves them ?

HERBERT.

As one that, touching them, draws strength from
God ;

Wins more than he bestows. He stops; he stands ;—
The exile gazes on his church again.

He kneels with arms outstretched, like holy Andrew
When venerating from afar his cross.

(*As BECKET enters the cathedral HERBERT goes up to him.*)

Now die whene'er God wills ! I never spake
That word before. In thee Christ's Church hath con-
quered.

[*Becket looks at him fixedly, and passes on without reply.*

SCENE VI.—A STREET IN CANTERBURY.

Citizens.

FIRST CITIZEN.

We are trapped and fooled. Death to the plotters !
Haste !

SECOND CITIZEN.

And which be they ?

FIRST CITIZEN.

Who knows?

THIRD CITIZEN.

A saint is Thomas!

None questions that our primate is a saint ;
But sanctity, some think, hath crazed his brain ;—
He comes not forth, as once.

FOURTH CITIZEN.

A knight from London
Saw all, and wept to tell it. Nine long hours
The primate, girt with French and Flemish hordes,
Besieged the young king's gates. Richard de Luci
Past hope arriving, quenched the flames just lit :
The rebels fled by night.

SECOND CITIZEN.

The father-king
Will rage at this.

FOURTH CITIZEN.

He 'll rage that two months since,
When Thomas wept before the royal feet,
He suffered his return. The holy queen
Pledged faith that hour for Canterbury's sons,
Whom as her own she loved.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Who told you that?

FOURTH CITIZEN.

The same old knight, kinsman of John of Oxford ;
And John, he said, saw all.

AN OLD KNIGHT (*riding up*).

God save you, sirs !

Conspirators are ye fat and well-loving !
Which lies the loudest ?

SEVERAL CITIZENS.

Nay, sir, true men we.

OLD KNIGHT.

Sirs, ye are Saxons ; Saxons speak no truth,
Else, wherefore hid they long like thieves in caverns
To keep their treasons warm? What beast are you
That with your foul hand stain my horse's neck
Which shone but now as glass?—Let none deceive
you!

They 'll leave you later to the royal wrath.
Beware of full-fed priests and haughty bishops !
The Conqueror sent you bishops staid and sage,
Most part from Normandy. They spake not English;
So vexed you not with sermons. What, my friends,

A man may go to heaven, yet hear not sermons !
That chime 's my dinner bell ! God save you, sirs,
And purge your primate's pride ! A saint I deem
him ;
No doubt there 's healing latent in his bones ;
De Broc has sworn to boil the proud flesh off them,
To make the relics sooner serviceable.
Be wary, sirs ; the knife is at your throat !

[*Rides away.*

SCENE VII.—A ROOM IN THE ARCHIEPISCOPAL
PALACE AT CANTERBURY.

THE PRIOR OF MERTON, LLEWELLEN.

LLEWELLEN.

Three bishops had arrived the day before me ;—
They instanced with such art the primate's rage,
Compassionated so well the kingdom's wrongs,
Some drew their swords; while fiercely cried the king,
'Your counsel, lords?' They answered, 'We are
priests :
Your captains and your peers shall best advise you.'
Leicester spake first ;—'t was parable, not counsel.

Malvoisin next—a babbler. Bohun thus :
‘ I know not what can deal with knaves revolted
But wicker-rope or sword.’ Then, mild of voice,
Gilbert of London, rising, spake : ‘ My lords,
Behoves us in this crisis to be meek,
Lest we too much inflame the primate’s zeal,
Who, like a king, an army at his back,
In vengeance sweeps from shore to shore of England,
To abase a king ill-crowned.’

THE PRIOR OF MERTON.

What answered Henry ?

LLEWELLEN.

There fell on him that frenzy of his race
Which threatens the world with doom. I know not
all—

The men that saw it, saw as in a trance,
And what they saw divulge not, save in part.
The fire-cloud of that wrath burned out at last :
The Ill Spirits left him. On the rush-strewn floor
There sat he glaring maniac-like, the straws
Now kneading and now gnawing. That too past.
The king was standing in their midst : his eye
Slowly he turned from each to each ; then spake
With pointed finger, and with serpent hiss :

'Slaves, slaves, not barons hath my kingdom bred,
Slaves that in silence stand, and eye their king
Mocked by a low-born knave ! '

THE PRIOR.

Did none reply ?

LLEWELLEN.

No man. From that mute hall four knights forth
strode—
Fitz-Urse, de Tracy, Moreville, Richard Brito.
At twelve last night they entered Saltwood gates :
De Broc attended them.

THE PRIOR.

The end draws nigh.

SCENE VIII.—A ROOM IN THE ARCHIEPISCOPAL
PALACE AT CANTERBURY.

JOHN OF SALISBURY, HERBERT OF BOSHAM.

HERBERT.

It was at Pontigny. His mass just said
Within the chapel of the proto-martyr,

He knelt in prayer. The words were :—‘Thomas,
Thomas !’

‘Who art Thou, Lord ?’ he answered. Then the
voice,

‘Thomas, I am thy Brother, and thy Lord :
My Church shall in thy blood be glorified,
And thou in Me.’

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

That voice was but his thought !

HERBERT.

The abbot then of Pontigny, just chosen
Lyon’s archbishop, came to say farewell :
He stood behind a pillar and heard all.
From him I learned it. Thomas kept it secret.
Thank God ! What comes to him shall come to us :—
There ’s nought to fear.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Herbert, I love my friend ;
But ’t was his triumph, not his death, I looked for :
For him I scarce should fear to die ; and yet
I love not death. Ere comes that hour, there ’s
much
To learn, to read, to do—and to repent.
—The solid earth shivers as ship in storm :

The ground is earthquake-shaken : shadows vast
Far flung, and whence we know not, o'er it sweep :
Fiercely the lightnings glare——

HERBERT OF BOSHAM.

Meantime the Church
Nor hastes, nor halts, nor frets, nor is amazed.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

What doth she then ?

HERBERT OF BOSHAM.

A smile upon her lips,
She stands with eyes close fixed upon her Lord,
Nay, on His sacred vestment's lowest hem,
To see where next He moves.

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Herbert, I wronged you :
A mystic, feeding on faith's inmost lore—
A dreamer, scanning mysteries in flowers—
I guessed not of your strength.

SCENE IX.—LONDON. THE HOUSE OF THE
CHIEF JUSTICIARY.

RICHARD DE LUCI, THE EARL OF CORNWALL.

DE LUCI.

What charge they 'gainst the man? What help
demand they?

CORNWALL.

They say he leads an army through the land;
And pray you to arrest him.

DE LUCI.

Tell those lords

They know as well as I that plot 's a fiction:
Five soldiers made his army. Three days since
Becket stood here: what hindered them to stay him?

CORNWALL.

My lord, their purpose absolute was to stay him:
Mischance bound up their arm. A Roman bolt
Flung by a nun's white hand among the bishops
Scattered the covey. Without aid from them,
The people, Becket-mad——

DE LUCI.

I understand :

That which the Council fain had done, but dared not,
It now would do through me. Return, my lord,
And tell them that this realm's justiciary
Is not their faction's hangman. Bid them know
I walk the ways of justice. Four years since
I deemed that Thomas sinned against the law,
And acted on that thought. When Thomas smote
me

I deemed his Censures dealt, 'errante clave' :—
They galled me not. This day men do him wrong,
Since right he had to visit the young king,
Who loathes even now the knaves that ill advised
him.

I hunt not with their pack.

SCENE X.—ARCHIEPISCOPAL PALACE AT
CANTERBURY.

HERBERT OF BOSHAM, EDWARD GRIM, LLEWELLEN, *Monks.*

HERBERT.

St. Stephen's festival ! Another Christmas !

Easter 's the Christian sunrise ; Pentecost
Its noon tide, flaming forth in golden rays ;
But Christmas is the aurora, pure and white ;
A feast it is of innocence and snow,
The Maid and Babe, angels and simple shepherds ;
'T is Mary's week in winter, sweet as May :—
The Man of Sorrows comes, but comes not yet ;
The sin of earth forgotten in the Saviour.

FIRST MONK.

What stranger's yon ?

SECOND MONK.

They call him Edward Grim ;
A Cambridge scholar. He had thirsted long
To see the primate.

FIRST MONK.

Ill he timed his visit :
None wants him here.

GRIM (*in a low voice to a monk*).

Proceed, my friend, I pray you.

THIRD MONK (*to Grim*).

On Christmas night he sang the midnight mass—
Our Benedictine rite. At noon he preached,
'Peace upon earth,' his text. 'We have not here

Abiding city, but we look for one ;'
Thus he began : ' Is this at war with peace ?
Nay, this alone is peace : bereft of all things,
Then most our God is ours ; and God is peace.'
Next spake he of the saints of Canterbury :
' Ye have a martyr likewise, St. 'Elphege,
And God may give you, friends, ere along another.'
On all sides sobs burst forth, and wail was heard,
' Father, desert us not ; '—one little moment
With them he wept ; and then in strength resumed :
Like some great anthem was that sermon's close,
The whole church glowing with seraphic joy.

FOURTH MONK.

The man is changed.

THIRD MONK.

Seldom he speaks ; his smile
Is like that smile upon a dead man's face,
A mystery of sweetness.

LLEWELLEN.

Lo, he comes !

BECKET (*entering*).

Herbert, my friend beloved, depart this night ;
Consign these letters to the good French King :

And you, my chaplain, Richard, speed to Norwich ;
Beseech its reverend bishop to absolve
All who in ignorance erred.

HERBERT.

Forbid it, God !
My lord, once only pardon disobedience !
We two have shared great dangers : let us share,
If so God wills, the last !

BECKET.

I have had from you,
Herbert, great love ! I claim this hour a greater :
Shake not my heart with any earthly passion.
More late we say farewell. Bertram, next morn
Seek out that aged priest we met at Wrotham,
That kind old man who serves another's charge :
This deed confers upon him Penshurst's church ;
Let it be his ere noon. My brave Llewellen,
To Rome, and bear these letters to the Pope !
That bitter word you spake at Clarendon
Saved me when all but lost. Except for you
I had up-towered this day in Europe's face
Robed in the total greatness of my country—
Within, a soul undone ! At dawn we keep
The feast of him who, sole of the apostles,

Died not for Christ. Perchance he loved Him most !
Perchance so great a thing is love, that death,
The martyr's death, could add not to its greatness.
The Church boasts next her Holy Innocents,
Martyrs through grace, though not their own intention :
What saint makes beautiful the third day hence ?

A MONK.

It lacks as yet its crown.

BECKET.

We give it then

To St. Elphege, martyr of Canterbury
Then when the Dane devastated the land :
His anthem I must hear once more. Farewell !

(*He moves away, but stops for a moment before a window.*)

How fair, how still, that snowy world ! The earth
Lies like a white rose under eyes of God—
May it send up a sweetness !

SCENE XI.—THE ROOF OF THE CATHEDRAL OF
CANTERBURY.THE PRIOR OF MERTON (*looking to the west*).

If that's no mist, one hope—

(To SCAILMAN, who approaches him.)

My Lord of Winton,
Though sick, arrives ere sunset, litter-borne :
That kingly countenance would o'erawe the fiercest
Without his pastoral staff, or fifty knights.
See you yon dust? We're saved!

SCAILMAN.

That dust, good prior,
Is dust from dusty tomes, which dims your eyes ;
The primate bade that old man house at home
A white head, England's hope. Our help is here :

(Lifting some keys.)

These roofs have many a hiding-place. Moreover
The city gates are ours.

THE PRIOR.

Escape is none.

If Thomas has refused old Winton's aid,
He will not hide, nor fly.

SCENE XII.—CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL—THE NORTH
TRANSEPT.JOHN OF SALISBURY *and a Monk.*

MONK.

Within his chamber we had sung our nocturns :
The office finished, for an hour or more
He stood beside the casement, open flung,
Despite the flying flakes. I heard him murmur,
' In years remote they deck the martyr's shrine—
Not many weep above a churchman's grave.
Is that a loss? Ah me !' Again I heard him :
' Herbert, my tenderest friend, and John, my wisest,
Both, both for me have lost their earthly all :
These must live on, bereft.' More late he asked
If Sandwich might be reached ere break of day.
We answered, ' Yea—two hours ere dawn.' Once
more
He stood forth-gazing through the winter night ;
Then spake aloud, ' Whate'er God hath in store,
Thomas will wait it patient in his church :
He leaves that church no more.'

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

The last chance lost !

MONK.

At yonder altar of St. Benedict
He said his mass. Next in the chapter-house
Conversed with two old monks of things divine :
Then for his confessor he sent, and made
Confession with his humble wont ; which ended,
He sat with us an hour, and held discourse
Full gladsomely. I never marked till then
How joyous was his eye. An old monk cried,
'Thank God, my lord, you make good cheer !' He
answered,
'Who goeth to his Master should be glad.'

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

His Master ! Aye, his Master ! Still as such
He thought of God ; he loved Him ;—in himself
Saw nothing great or wise—simply a servant.
Ere yet his earliest troubles had begun
I heard him say, 'A bishop should protect
That holy thing, God's Church, to him committed,
Not only from the world, but from himself,
Loving, not hers, but her, with reverent love,
A love that, on her gazing, fears to touch her.

As Mary in the guardian Patriarch's house,
Such should she be in his.'

MONK.

Through life thus wrought he !

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

The Church's wealth will one day be her ruin—
He hated rapine ; warred on sacrilege ;
Too soon perchance—yet still as poor man lived ;
Trod down abuses. Had he reigned ten years
His name had been for aye 'the Great Reformer.'
—Peace, peace ! O God, we make our tale of him,
As men that praise the dead !

(*After a pause.*)

Against the primate they can find no charge :
The Council failed. That brings the danger closer :
The sword of law flung down, the assassin's knife—
At morn, they say, the palace will be stormed :
With him at least I die. Alas, poor Herbert !

MONK.

We who have stalls are summoned. Lo, they come.

(*The monks of St. Augustine's enter the Cathedral ; they advance to the chapel of the chapter, accompanied by JOHN OF SALISBURY and his companion, and immediately begin*

vespers. During the singing of the psalms, a wild cry bursts out in the streets, accompanied by a rush of soldiers against the southern gates. The monks continue the sacred rite. A few minutes later a procession enters from the cloister, BECKET walking last, preceded by his cross-bearer. Having reached a spot in the north transept, midway between the altar of the Blessed Virgin and that of St. Benedict, he stands still.)

BECKET.

Those who are monks must take their place at vespers :
Make haste, and join the Chapter. Ye are late.

(His attendants obey him ; none remaining with BECKET except the PRIOR OF MERTON, FITZ-STEPHEN, and EDWARD GRIM. A few monks stand close within the western gates of the Cathedral. A rush of feet is heard outside, and cries of 'Open the gates—save us !')

A MONK.

Keep barred the gates—the soldiers once among us——

FITZ-STEPHEN (*coming up*).

The primate bids you fling the portals wide :
He says a church must not be made a castle :
'Let all my people in.'

(FITZ-STEPHEN *returns*.)

(The gates are opened ; a terrified crowd rushes in ; soldiers pursue them ; but on entering the Cathedral are overawed and kneel. Vespers proceed.)

The Anthem.

Behold a great High Priest with rays
Of martyrdom's red sunset crowned ;

None other like him in the days
 Wherein he trod the earth was found.
 The swords of men unholy met
 Above that just one and he bled :
 But God, the God he served, hath set
 A wreath unfading on his head.

THE PRIOR.

A martyr's anthem !

FITZ-STEPHEN.

Yea ; our great Elphege.

THE PRIOR.

The church grows dark as night.

FITZ-STEPHEN.

A deed more dark

Will make the night ashamed.

The Anthem.

Blest is the people, blest and strong,
 Whose Pontiffs count a martyred saint ;
 His virtuous memory, lasting long,
 Shall keep their altars pure from taint.
 The heathen plot ; the tyrants rage ;
 But in their saint the poor shall find
 A shield, or after many an age
 A light restored to guide the blind.

THE PRIOR.

We are here but three.

FITZ-STPHEN.

You heard his Grace dismiss them :
The last I saw was Henry of Auxerre :
He bore the cross—yon scholar caught it falling.

(*The soldiers rise from their knees and form round the gates.*)

THE PRIOR.

My lord archbishop, seek the sanctuary !
Stand fast by the high altar——

FITZ-STPHEN.

Nay, the crypt ——

BECKET.

My place is here;—farewell, my friends !

THE PRIOR.

In the cloister
I hear an armed tread : a postern 's there ;
Not many know it. Who be those four knights,
In sable mailed, and fiercely onward striding,
With vizors down ?

(*FITZ-URSE, DE TRACY, BRITO, and DE MOREVILLE enter.*)

FITZ-STPHEN.

Their guide alone I know—
De Broc it is—de Broc !

BECKET.

Seek out, my friends,
 That chapel where they sing—ye cannot see it—
 The rite completed, bid them chaunt Te Deum.

(*The PRIOR and FITZ-STEPHEN depart; EDWARD GRIM alone remains with BECKET. The four knights arrive, but at first do not see the primate, who is screened by a pillar.*)

FITZ-URSE.

Where is the traitor?

BECKET (*advancing, and standing opposite the altar of St. Benedict*).

Here I stand ; no traitor,
 But priest of God, and primate of this land.

FITZ-URSE (*after looking at him long*).

God help thee, priest ! At once absolve those bishops!

BECKET.

The Church of God suspends them for their sin ;
 The king approved that sentence ; thrice approved :
 Two hundred heard him : you were of their number.

FITZ-URSE.

Never.

BECKET.

I saw you, and God saw you there.

FITZ-URSE.

Remove those Censures.

BECKET.

You have had your answer.

Reginald, Reginald ! a time there was
You vowed to me your fealty. Lo, this day
You seek my blood.

FITZ-URSE.

I owe you fealty none

Which wars against my king.

BECKET.

Alas ! light man,

That giv'st thine all for nought ! If yet thou canst,
Repent and live !

FITZ-URSE.

He threatens—lo, he threatens !

Our lives he threatens, and reviles the king !
He 'll place the realm beneath an interdict ;—
Traitor ! thine hour is come !

(*He seizes BECKET ; the rest also close around him.*)

BECKET.

Ye that would slay the shepherd, spare the sheep !

If not, I bind you with the Church's Sentence.
That which ye do, do here.

FITZ-URSE (*drawing his sword*).

Loose him, and slay !

BECKET (*joining his hands over his eyes, and bending forward*).

My spirit I commend to God Most High,
The prayers of Mary, mother of my Lord,
And those two martyrs of the Church of God,
Saints Denys and Elphege.

(WILLIAM DE TRACY *draws his sword, and aims a blow at BECKET. EDWARD GRIM intercepts it with his arm, which is nearly severed. The sword descends, notwithstanding, on the head of BECKET.*)

BECKET.

I yield Thee thanks, my Maker, and my God !
Receive my soul.

(*He falls forward on his knees. The second blow is struck by FITZ-URSE, and the third by BRITO.*)

BECKET.

For the great Name of Jesus, and that Church
Cleansed by His saving blood, with joy I die.

[*He falls forward on his face and dies.*

DE MOREVILLE.

O black and dreadful day ! Earth reels beneath us !

FITZ-URSE.

The traitor 's dead ! He 'll rise no more. Rush forth !
And ever make your cry, ' King's men are we ! '

[*They rush forth waving their swords, and shouting
' King's men ! '*

1

N O T E S.

The king is neither. Sir, he 's Angevine, p. 5.

'In the eleventh century and in the thirteenth there was an English King and an English People; but in the twelfth such objects are hardly discernible. There is, indeed, a King of England, the mightiest and richest prince of Europe; but he is a mere foreigner, a Frenchman living in France, devoting his energies to French objects, and holding England almost as a province of Anjou. And as with the position of the island, so with its internal controversies.'—*Saint Thomas of Canterbury and his Biographers*, by Edward A. Freeman (*Historic Essays*).

To the same effect Lord Macaulay writes:—'During the century and a half which followed the Conquest there is, to speak strictly, no English history. . . . Almost every historian of England has expatiated with a sentiment of exultation on the power and splendour of her foreign masters, and has lamented the decay of that power and splendour as a calamity to our country. This is, in truth, as absurd as it would be in a Haytian negro of our time to dwell with national pride on the greatness of Louis XIV., and to speak of Blenheim and Ramillies with patriotic regret and shame. The Conqueror and his descendants to the fourth generation were not Englishmen; most of them were born in France; their ordinary speech was French; almost every high office in their gift was filled by a

Frenchman ; every acquisition which they made on the Continent estranged them more and more from the population of our island.'—*Macaulay's History of England*, chap. i.

She cut her flaxen Saxon tresses short, p. 5.

Some legends have found more believers in recent than in early times. Canon Morris¹ speaks of the romance respecting Becket's Saracen mother as 'a fable which is not mentioned by one of the many contemporary biographers of our saint,' adding, in a note, 'Writers so various as Godwin, Cave, Thierry, and Sharon Turner, Froude, and Giles, the author of the Cologne Life of 1639, Cola, Beaulieu, and our own accurate Alban Butler, all admit the story of Gilbert's escape from a Saracen prison, and his marriage with a Saracen princess. Mr. Berington was the first to reject it' (p. 401).

He scourged those boors of Flanders from the realm, p. 6.

Henry had had the aid of Archbishop Theobald as well as of his successor in such enterprises. Mr. Green, in his recent History, says : 'He [Henry] had been placed on the throne, as we have seen, by the Church. His first work was to repair the evils which England had endured till his accession by the restoration of the system of Henry I. ; and it was with the aid and counsel of Theobald that the foreign marauders were driven from the realm, the castles demolished, in spite of the opposition of the baronage, the King's Court and the Exchequer restored. Age and infirmity, however, warned the primate to retire from the post of Minister, and his power fell into the younger and more vigorous hands of Thomas à Becket, who had long acted as his confidential adviser,' p. 102. Mr. Green also remarks as follows :—'England was rescued from this chaos of misrule by the efforts of the Church. . . . The com-

¹ 'The Life and Martyrdom of St. Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury,' by John Morris, Canon of Northampton.

pact between king and people had become a part of constitutional law in the charter of Henry, but its legitimate consequence in the responsibility of the Crown for the execution of the compact was first drawn out by these ecclesiastical councils. . . . Extravagant, and unauthorised as their expression of it may appear, they did express the right of a nation to good government . . . “To the Church,” Thomas (Becket) afterwards justly said, with the proud consciousness of having been Theobald’s right hand, “Henry owed his crown and England her deliverance.”” *Short History of the English People*, by J. R. Green, p. 99.

*The garden dial
Is lawful appanage of the garden’s lord*, p. 17.

One of the most remarkable men of the twelfth century was the courtier Bishop of Lisieux. He truckled to Henry, yet he knew well enough at which side justice lay. He writes thus to Becket, A.D. 1165:—‘Every doubt which was on our minds is now dissipated, and the purity of your motives is become so evident, that honest men are rejoiced and your enemies are confounded. Justice and the liberty of the Church you preferred to every earthly emolument; for had you consented to these *new abuses*, not only might you have lived in peace; you might have reigned with your prince. . . . You even exposed your life. But it seems that there the king was indulgent, and had not lost all affection for you. He strove to intimidate you into compliance.’ He proceeds:—‘Your cause is manifestly just, since you contend for the liberty of the Church, which cannot be attacked without interesting our faith. . . . This it was which drew your suffragans so basely from you. . . . The inferior clergy, for the most part, love you much, but the fear of banishment withdraws them, and they are contented to sigh, and in secret to express their wishes for your safety. As to the nobility, they have formed, as it were, a conspiracy against the Church, in all things to oppose her honour and advantage. . . .

They say the king should not govern with less dignity than his predecessors, who were less powerful than he ; *and every attempt they made, however contrary to religion and reason, these men pretend was a part of the royal prerogative.* By flattery they prevail on him to engage in contests, hoping in fact that his power may be weakened in the quarrel, and that themselves shall recover their lost privilege of transgressing the laws with impunity.' He concludes characteristically :—' Farewell ; and if you mention the contents of this letter, take care to conceal my name.'—Berington's 'Hist.' vol. ii. pp. 189–91.

Phœbus paced the wooded mountains, p. 22.

These stanzas are an imitation of an old Romaic poem, one of the 'Robber songs' sung for centuries by the bandits, more properly called 'outlaws,' on the mountains of Greece. The mingling of Greek mythology with a sentiment tenderer than that which commonly belonged to the poetry engendered by that mythology in Pagan times is interesting.

This day the Spirit Prophetic on me falls, p. 50.

This prophetic warning is recorded by Canon Morris,¹ with a reference to Giraldus Cambrensis (note, p. 409).

*These be Becket's clients,
Secure from civil courts*, p. 54.

It was on this question that the contest between Henry and Becket arose, and when Becket first engaged to observe the Customs, he probably regarded this as the matter chiefly at issue. It proved to be but a small part of that great question, which otherwise would have speedily found its solution.

Mr. Green thus explains the royal claim :—' Henry at once proposed to the bishops that a clerk convicted of a crime should

¹ 'The Life and Martyrdom of St. Thomas Becket.'

be deprived of his orders, and handed over to the king's tribunals. The local Courts of the Feudal Baronage had been roughly shorn of their power by the judicial reforms of Henry I., and the Church Courts, as the Conqueror had created them, with their exclusive right of justice over the whole body of educated men throughout the realm, formed the one great exception to the system which was concentrating all jurisdiction in the hands of the king. The bishops yielded, but opposition came from the very prelate whom Henry had created to enforce his will. . . . A prudent man might have doubted the wisdom of destroying the only shelter which protected piety or learning against a despot like the Red King; and in the mind of Thomas the ecclesiastical immunities were parts of the sacred heritage of the Church.'¹

With equal candour Mr. Freeman points out in how different a light from that in which we see it, this immunity must have presented itself to the men of the twelfth century:—‘ We must remember that, if the so-called liberties of the Church were utterly repugnant to our notions of settled government, they did not appear equally so in those times. The modern idea of government is an equal system of law for every part of the territory and for every class of the nation. In the middle ages every class of men, every district, every city, tried to isolate itself within a jurisprudence of its own. Nobles, burghers, knights of orders, wherever either class was strong enough, refused the jurisdiction of any but their own peers. . . . Even within the ecclesiastical pale, we find peculiar jurisdictions, orders, monasteries, chapters, colleges, shake off the authority of the regular ordinaries, and substitute some exceptional tribunal of their own. . . . In short, the privileges for which Thomas contended transferred a large part of the people, and that the most helpless part, from the bloody grasp of the King's Courts to the milder jurisdiction of the bishop. . . . One of the

¹ ‘A Short History of the English People,’ p. 103.

Constitutions of Clarendon, that which forbade the ordination of *villains* without the consent of their lords, was directly aimed at the only means by which the lowest class in the State could rise.¹

It need hardly be remarked that changes, in themselves good and eventually necessary, may yet prove fatal if made prematurely. In the Saxon times the civil and spiritual powers worked conjointly, the bishop and the sheriff sitting in the same Court. William the Conqueror was the first to separate the two jurisdictions in England. He caused the bishop to sit in his own Court without an assessor. A more developed Canon Law thus necessarily grew up, and more frequent appeals to the central see. Henry II. disliked this effect of the change, and proposed to remedy it, not by returning to the old system, but by another innovation, one which would have deprived society at once, and with no preparation, of a protection against hard-handed oppression which the feebler part of society had enjoyed in all Christian lands from the earlier centuries. The consequences likely to have resulted, if the clergy had suddenly been deprived of their privilege of being tried in the spiritual Courts only, Becket would have illustrated by the injustice with which, during the first two days of the Council of Northampton, the highest ecclesiastic in the land had been, on a series of notoriously false pretences, condemned to the payment of sums so enormous that the sentence might well have consigned him to a dungeon for life. That this prosecution was a combination of fraud and violence on Henry's part is admitted by historians wholly opposed to Becket, as Hume and Sharon Turner.

At Clarendon I sinned—thus much all know, p. 74.

Mr. Hurrell Froude asserts ('History,' p. 81) that the pledge given by Becket at Clarendon relative to the Royal

¹ 'St. Thomas of Canterbury and his Biographers' ('Historic Essays,' by Edward A. Freeman).

Customs was given by him ‘subject to the Pope’s approval,’ and adds, ‘Thus the decrees of Clarendon, for want of his (the Pope’s) confirmation, remained incomplete.’ This statement, which would clear Becket from the charge commonly brought against him, does not seem to be confirmed by early authorities, as far as I know.

Few things are more pathetic than this single lapse on the part of Becket—so frankly confessed by him, so bitterly expiated, the result at once of so much pressure, and so much treachery practised against him—and sometimes, at least, so entirely misrepresented. Lord Lyttelton, in his ‘History of Henry II.,’ relied unhappily on a document unworthy of his credence. That document is adverted to by Dr. Lingard as the ‘spurious letter attributed to Foliot’ by which ‘Lord Lyttelton was deceived.’ Mr. Berington, a writer of known moderation, had replied to it soon after the appearance of Lord Lyttelton’s work, in his ‘History of Henry II.,’ vol. ii. appendix ii. He shows, first, that it is hardly to be equalled for the number of statements which it contains contrary to known facts. Secondly, that in its account of the Council of Clarendon it is opposed to all contemporary histories, including those of Roger de Hoveden and Diceto, who were probably from their situation present on the occasion. Thirdly, that the dreadful charges which it brings against Becket must, if true, have been frequently flung in his face, especially the charge that he had addressed the bishops with the words, ‘It is my master’s will that I should forswear myself, and I now submit to it and incur perjury, afterwards to do penance as I am able;’ while, on the contrary, such charges were never urged against him, whether by the king’s followers, by the bishops when addressing him in letters or appealing against him to the Pope, or by Foliot himself when assailing him at Northampton and at Sens. Fourthly, he specifies four several circumstances stated by that letter to have taken place at the Council of Clarendon, circumstances aided by which Becket,

as alleged, seduced the bishops into accepting the Customs ; and he shows that those circumstances took place, not at Clarendon, but at Northampton, where it is admitted that Becket alone stood out against the Customs, his fellow-bishops accepting them. He concludes that a letter full of allegations so easily refuted could hardly have been written by any one within two years of the Council of Northampton—that it probably was never written by Foliot, and that if his, it certainly was not intended for Becket's eyes. To imagine that Becket would have left such charges without a prompt reply he shows to be wholly absurd. Foliot's supposed letter would have offended his patron not less than it would have outraged Becket. It represented the king simply as a tyrant, and the Council of Clarendon as a 'Latrocinium,' which of course could have had no moral claim to validity.

Neither Lord Lyttelton nor Foliot's supposed letter corroborates an assertion often made in late times, viz. that Becket not only promised at Clarendon to observe the Royal Customs, but when the 'Constitutions' professing to embody them were submitted to the assembly, attached his signature, and, as some have added, his seal, to that document. Such a statement is unsupported, and in several cases directly denied, by the contemporary authorities I have at the present the means of consulting—with the exception of FitzStephen—viz., by Edward Grim, Roger of Pontigny, John of Salisbury, Alan of Tewkesbury, William of Canterbury, and Herbert of Bosham. Roger de Hoveden states that he promised to observe the Customs, but that on the schedule of the Constitutions being presented to him, 'the Archbishop of Canterbury swore that he would never annex his seal to that writing or confirm those laws.' Herbert of Bosham details the arguments by which Becket assailed the 'Constitutions' at Clarendon. Speed,¹ Berington, and Lingard state that he refused to seal them, and make no mention of his signing them.

¹ 'History of Great Britain,' Edit. 1632, p. 489.

My sin has found me out, p. 89.

The monks themselves affirmed that their election of Becket to the primacy was free. It may, notwithstanding, be true that they would have preferred an archbishop who had belonged to their monastery, and that, though not coerced, they were influenced by the Royal choice.

A successor of mine, p. 117.

St. Edmund of Canterbury during his exile found a refuge in the abbey of Pontigny.

Thus writes he to the apostate of Cologne, p. 122.

It would hardly have seemed possible that Henry, who had frequently appealed to the Pope, could have thought of transferring, on personal grounds, his spiritual allegiance from one whom he had ever acknowledged as its lawful object, to a pretender. His temporary defection is thus recorded by Lingard ('History of England,' edit. 1854, p. 76):—'He even opened a correspondence with the Emperor; and in a general diet at Wurtzburg his ambassadors made oath, in the name of their master, that he would reject Alexander and obey the authority of his rival. Of this fact there cannot be a doubt. It was announced to the German nations by an Imperial edict, and is attested by an eye-witness, who from the Council wrote to the Pope a full account of the transaction. Henry, however, soon repented of his precipitancy. His bishops refused to disgrace themselves by transferring their allegiance at the nod of their prince; and he was unwilling to involve himself in a new, and apparently a hopeless, quarrel. To disguise or excuse his conduct, he disavowed the act, attributed it to his envoys, and afterwards induced them also to deny it. John of Oxford was despatched to Rome, who, in the presence of Alexander,

swore that at Wurtzburg he had done nothing contrary to the faith of the Church, or to the honour and service of the Pontiff.'

To the same effect is Lord Lyttelton's narrative ('Hist.' vol. ii. p. 449). He gives the letter of Henry to the Archbishop of Cologne contracting that engagement. He next states that Richard of Ivelchester and John of Oxford were sent to Wurtzburg, where a Diet was assembled for the acknowledgment of the anti-Pope ; and he proceeds :—' And (if we may believe the Emperor's letters patent soon afterwards published) did there, in the name of their master, take an oath upon the reliques of saints, that the King of England and his whole kingdom would faithfully adhere to the Emperor's party, and constantly acknowledge the Pope, whom he had acknowledged, without doing anything further to support the schismatic Orlando [Alexander III.]' The only excuse which he makes is that the engagement of Henry's envoys should perhaps be considered as conditional on Alexander III.'s not changing his course as regards Becket. He makes a remarkable suggestion :—' Perhaps they [Henry's envoys] had acted upon secret instructions, which he thought proper to deny to all but themselves. However this may be, it is sufficiently evident that his honour suffered very much from the transaction. For he did not frighten Alexander into any compliance with his demands ; nor yet did he quit him, upon their being rejected, as by his letter to the Archbishop of Cologne he had promised to do.' (Ibid. pp. 451-2.)

We have a better augury his heart is good, p. 129.

Numberless passages in Becket's letters prove that his early attachment to the king had never ceased ; nay, that to the last he believed that his opposition to the king's demands was the most faithful service he could pay to a king misled by courtiers and flatterers.

In my name write, and thus, p. 132.

The freedom of speech used by Becket was as great as that

tolerated by him. It is thus that he wrote to his envoy at Rome on the appointment of the two legates whose commission virtually suspended his own legantine authority. The translation is that given in Mr. Hurrell Froude's valuable history of Becket's struggle, p. 242 :—‘If this be true, then without doubt his lordship the Pope has suffocated and strangled, not only our own person, but himself and every ecclesiastic of both kingdoms ; yea, both Churches together, the Gallican and the English. For what will not the kings of the earth dare against the clergy, under cover of this most wretched precedent ? And on what can the Church of Rome rely, when it thus deserts and leaves destitute the persons who are making a stand in its cause, and contending for it even unto death.’ In a similar tone is his letter ‘To all the Cardinals’ written on the same occasion. (*Ibid.* 248–50.)

‘Smooth speeches are not for the wretched, nor guarded words for the bitter in soul. May my bitter thoughts be pardoned, my wretchedness indulged. It is our belief, most holy fathers, that you stand in high places, as God’s delegates, to put aside injustice, to cut off presumption, to relieve the sorrowing priesthood, and stop the way against its persecutors ; to assist the oppressed and punish the oppressors. . . . Trust then to me, my beloved lords, . . . resume your strength, gird yourselves with the Word of the Most High as with a sword. . . . This is the Royal way, this is the way that leadeth to life, this is the way that you must walk in if ye would follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ and the footsteps of His apostles whose vicars ye are. It is not by craft, it is not by wise schemes, that the Church is to be governed, but by Justice and by Truth.’

This remarkable freedom of speech neither implied nor was supposed to imply the sligh’st want of reverence on the part of Becket to the Holy See. Pope Alexander received it as meekly as Becket himself had received the friendly reproof of his faithful cross-bearer, Llewellen. On one occasion he wrote to the primate in a tone almost apologetic ; it was towards the close

of that great man's career (ibid. p. 521) :—‘ Among the manifold anxieties which the evil of the times brings upon us, the labour which you have undergone in defence of the liberty of the Church distrubs us not a little ; desiring, as we do, very earnestly to assist you, and yet hindered by various and pressing reasons from doing so. . . . And if it be true that sailors even are sometimes so perplexed by changing winds as not to be able to determine whether to proceed onward or return to port, no wonder or blame can attach to him who steers the vessel of the Church, if, in a vast and spacious sea, where creeping things innumerable cross his path, and the risk is not of body and carnal profit, but of soul and spiritual grace, he is unable to see all at once on what side to incline his opinion ; if, in short, different views arise, according to the difference of men’s wishes, and he who advances a particular cause disagrees with him who consults, and ought to consult, for the good of the whole.’

Becket looked chiefly to a ‘ particular cause,’ his country, in which he beheld a process of destruction rapidly going on, the moral consequences of which threatened to continue, and to advance in evil, even after the political oppression which had engendered them had been redressed. He writes accordingly :!—‘ But your Holiness counsels me to bear with patience meanwhile. And do you not observe, O Father, what this meanwhile may bring about, to the injury of the Church and of your Holiness’s reputation ? Meanwhile he applies to his own purposes the revenues of the vacant abbeys and bishoprics, and will not suffer pastors to be ordained there. . . . Meanwhile who is to take charge of the Sheep of Christ,’ &c.

And, seeing, is self-judged, and sees no longer, p. 149.

Readers of the higher poetry will hardly need to be reminded of a passage in ‘The Dream of Gerontius,’ by which

¹ ‘The Life and Martyrdom of St. Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury,’ by John Morris, Canon of Northampton.

this line was probably suggested. (See ‘Verses on Various Occasions,’ p. 336. Burns, Oates, and Co.)

*A whisper stirs
That instruments consenting to that deed, p. 169.*

It has been affirmed that the Pope was induced by John of Oxford to grant to the Archbishop of York permission to crown young Prince Henry, despite the acknowledged rights of Canterbury. If he had done so, the Archbishop and those bishops who acted with him at that coronation must, notwithstanding, since they acknowledged his power to cancel the ancient right of Canterbury, have equally acknowledged his power to cancel his own concession, and to reaffirm that right. Considering how the Pope had been deceived by John of Oxford when he superseded Becket's Legantine authority, it might have been not beyond the skill of the famous ‘Swearer’ to have, for a time, deceived him again. A letter or bull, professing to come from the Pope, exists among the Cottonian MSS., permitting the Archbishop of York to crown the Prince. Mr. Berington, in his ‘History of Henry II.’ (vol. ii. appendix ii.), denies its authenticity, assigning six reasons for doing so. They are certainly grave reasons ; whether they are conclusive it is not for me to say. The supposition most favourable to Roger of York and the other two bishops would be one not very probable, but perhaps not impossible, viz. that the letters sent by the Pope, prohibiting the course which they subsequently adopted, failed to reach them, though issued three times—the English ports being then strictly guarded—and failed without connivance on their part.

The King of France—I sought him out at Sens, p. 170.

The account given by Canon Morris of the interview between Becket and the two kings at Montmirail includes much that

is characteristic :—‘ Before the conference began, St. Thomas was surrounded by his friends, who, almost unanimously, tried to induce him to make his submission to King Henry absolutely, adding no condition or clause, and leaving all the matter in dispute to the king’s generosity. . . . Herbert of Bosham managed to thrust himself in amongst the crowd of great people to whisper a warning to the saint that, if he omitted the clause “saving God’s honour” now, he would be sure afterwards to repent it as bitterly as he had done the omission of the former clause in England. There was not time for him to answer by more than a look when they were in the presence of the kings.’ Henry addressed Louis. ‘ This speech produced a great effect. Some people called out, “The king humbles himself enough.” The Archbishop was silent for a while, when Louis said, in a way which delighted the friends of the King of England, “My Lord Archbishop, do you want to be more than a saint? or better than Peter? Why do you doubt? Peace is at hand.” . . . The majority even of his own followers were led away by the current feeling, and were jealous of losing the restoration to their homes, which had seemed just within their grasp. As they were riding away after the conference the horse of one of them named Henry de Hocstune, who was riding just before the Archbishop, stumbled, on which the rider called out, loud enough for the saint to hear, “Go on, saving the honour of God, and of holy Church, and of my Order.” Here again the Archbishop, much as he was pained, did not speak.’ The poor never forsook him. ‘ As they went, people asked who it was that was going by; and when they heard that it was the Archbishop of Canterbury, they pointed him out to one another, saying, “That is the Archbishop who yesterday would not deny God or neglect his honour for the sake of the kings.” Soon after all was changed. King Louis discovered that Henry had deceived him; and one of the Papal envoys, Bernard of Grammont, said to Herbert, “I would rather have my foot cut off

than that your lord the Archbishop should have made peace at that Conference, as I and all the others advised him.''¹

*May it please your Highness plainly to declare
If you confirm that sentence, p. 181.*

The suspension of the bishops who assisted at the young prince's coronation has sometimes been mistaken for a new act of hostility on the part of Becket against the king, and as the cause of Henry's outbreak—the immediate though unintended occasion of the Archbishop's murder. This view is negatived by historic facts. The king had consented to that suspension at Freitval. “As for those who up to this time have betrayed the interests of both of us, I will, with God's help, answer them as traitors deserve.¹ . . .” That Henry expressly and publicly consented to the punishment of the bishops, who had merely executed his will, is perfectly certain; but as it is a point of the very greatest consequence, since the anger that led to the martyrdom was excited by the course here agreed to by the king himself, and as just before his death St. Thomas solemnly reminded Fitz-Urse of this very consent, it will be well to insert the words of another witness. “I was present,” writes Theobald, Earl of Blois, to the Pope, “when the King of England received the Archbishop of Canterbury with every sign of peace and goodwill. . . . Complaint was then made of the bishops who had dared to place the new king on the throne, against the right and honour of the Church of Canterbury; and the king gave him free and lawful power over them, that at your Holiness's pleasure, or at his, sentence might be pronounced against them. Those things I saw and heard; and I am ready to attest and confirm them by an oath, or in whatever other mode you may prefer.”² Herbert of Bosham makes a similar statement.

The same fact was adverted to as a matter of notoriety by the

¹ ‘The Life of St. Thomas of Canterbury,’ by Canon Morris, pp. 245-52.

² Ibid. pp. 287-8.

Archbishop himself when Fitz-Urse and the other three knights intruded themselves into his presence in his palace just before the murder.¹

Henry had long before seen his bishops under severer sentences than that of suspension ; and Becket, far from having originated the last sentences against them, had used his influence with the Pope to mitigate their force. Henry had better excuse for his disastrous storm of passion. ‘The Archbishop [on his way to the young king] was accompanied by five mounted soldiers as an escort, on account of the unsafe state of the roads. It was reported to King Henry that he was marching about England with a great army, besieging the towns, and intending to drive the young king out of the country.’²

‘The three prelates . . . threw themselves at his feet, imploring his justice against the primate, and his clemency for themselves, for his clergy, and for his kingdom. He had abused the king’s indulgence, they said, *adding falsely*, that he had excommunicated, *not themselves only*, but *all those who were present at the prince’s coronation*. “Then, by God’s eyes,” said Henry in a rage, “he has excommunicated me.” They proceeded to say, with *equal truth*, that, escorted by an armed band of soldiers, he was gone to the young king, purposing to enter his castles’ (vol. i. p. 288, Berington’s ‘History’). His reference is Vita, c. 8, 11, Gerv. He thus describes the deception practised on the young king :—‘They [the three prelates] before their departure, despatched messengers to the young king, by malicious insinuations to persuade him that it was the archbishop’s intention to deprive him of his throne (vol. i. p. 286). The reference is Vita, c. 5, 6, 7 ; Ep. 64, 73.

The Pope hath passed the sentence, p. 202.

An interesting letter is given by Mr. H. Froude (‘History,’

¹ ‘The Life of St. Thomas of Canterbury,’ by Canon Morris, p. 320.

² Ibid. pp. 307-8.

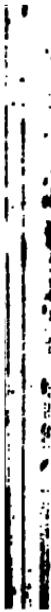
p. 33), written by Becket to the nun Idonea, when placing in her charge the sentence which she was to deliver into the hand of the Archbishop of York.

And wake a slumbering realm, p. 205.

Dr. Lingard thus records the consequences of Becket's death :—‘The moment of his death was the triumph of his cause. . . . The advocates of the Customs were silenced. Those who had been eager to condemn were now the foremost to applaud his conduct ; and his bitterest foes sought to remove from themselves the odium of having been his persecutors. The cause of the Church again flourished ; its liberties seemed to derive new life and additional vigour from the blood of the champion’ (‘Hist. of England,’ vol. ii. p. 83).

I deemed his Censures dealt, ‘errante clave,’ p. 234.

‘Richard de Laci ‘founded the Abbey of Lesnes in Kent, in honour of the martyr [Becket] and became a canon there after his resignation’ (Professor Stubbs’s ‘Constitutional Hist.,’ vol. i. p. 469).



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